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AESCHYLUS' BLACK-ROBED WOMEN:
AN INTERPRETATION OF THE CHORUS OF CHOEPHORI

BY

ELIZABETH FRANCISCA VIEIRA-RIBEIRO

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTERS OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1987

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ISBN 0-315-41144-9

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DEGREE: MASTERS OF ARTS

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1987

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled AESCHYLUS' BLACK-ROBED WOMEN: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE CHORUS OF CHOĒPHORI in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Classics.

Rosemary M. Nielsen
Supervisor

Dated: July 3, 1987

DEDICATION

To Professor Hugh Parry at York University who introduced me to τὸ καλόν of Greek tragedy; to Professor Ron Shepherd at the University of Toronto who helped me to further my understanding and appreciation of that beauty; and to Professor Paul Swarney whose love of the field of Classics extends to all who meet him.

ABSTRACT

Scholars of critical essays and commentaries on Aeschylus' Choephori have focused their attention on the characterization of Orestes, Electra, and Clytemnestra, and not on that of the chorus. The present thesis closely examines the images and diction of the chorus of slave women who speak forty-one percent of the lines in the play. I shall demonstrate that the women are presented as realistic, subtle, and feminine characters. Their characterization is as relevant to the meaning of the play as the language, the action, and the attitudes of its other characters.

Chapter One is a detailed examination of previous scholarship on the role, or lack thereof, of the chorus. This chapter is a necessary first step in seeing how other scholars assess the chorus, and it sets this thesis in perspective. Chapter Two analyzes the parodos and the kommos. The chorus use ambiguous language as a tool in order to influence Electra and Orestes to perform an act of vengeance that ironically also carries out the women's desire for revenge against the House of Pelops. Chapter Three examines a significant interlude (479-585) occurring between the kommos and the First Stasimon, where the chorus dwell upon the image of the snake and use it to bind Clytemnestra and her son together as kin-killers. Chapter Four examines the rest of the play (585-1075) in order, first, to connect Orestes, the serpent-son, with the vengeance of the serpent-like Furies, and, second, to show the chorus as 'aiders and abettors' of a murder-plot. Chapter Five

considers whether Aeschylus is misogynistic and uses the recent study of the trilogy by the feminist classicist, Froma Zeitlin. Unlike Zeitlin, my analysis of the subtle intertwining of plot and images reveals Aeschylus' vision, not only of the plight of the chorus under patriachy, but also of every female character or set of characters in the trilogy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank Rosemary M. Nielsen whose aid, guidance, encouragement, and φιλία proved invaluable in the preparation of this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: SCHOLARS' PORTRAIT OF THE CHORUS OF CHOEPHORI

There are numerous commentaries on Oresteia, the only extant trilogy of Aeschylus, who was renowned in Antiquity for his work in that dramatic form. For the most part, scholars have focused their attention on Agamemnon and, although there have been a few commentaries on Choephori, these works study primarily the characterization of Orestes and Electra, rather than that of the chorus of slave women. No systematic analysis of the chorus' odes and speeches exists beyond an examination of the women's participation in the famous kommos (306-478) which results in Orestes' plan to avenge his father's death. Since the chorus speak forty-one percent of the play, not only the plot to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but also its eventual success are actions that may be directly attributable to the women's persuasive skills.

The present thesis provides a close examination of the images and diction of the chorus in all of the play's major scenes. It finds that, although outsiders themselves, the slave women are knowledgeable about the curse on Pelops' House and its devastating effects upon successive generations of the kin-group. This thesis argues that, through ambiguous allusions to kin, blood curses, and their own suffering as victims of tyranny, the women encourage and use Orestes' and Electra's desire for vengeance as a means of expressing their own hatred

of the House. In order to set this approach in perspective, it will be useful, first, to review previous scholarship on the role of the chorus. The significance that this thesis finds in the role must, of course, be weighed against its relative insignificance in previous scholarship.

One of the earliest commentaries in English on Choephori is A.W. Verrall's (1893).[1] In his 65-page introduction to the Greek text, he refers to the chorus only in passing and regards the play as "The Story of Orestes" -- a focus made clear by the title he gives to the chapter.[2] In my opinion, Verrall's reduction of the role of the chorus reflects a mode of scholarship that speaks of the women only in their relationship to other characters in the play. It is ironic that the chorus, whose words dominate the action, are passed over in silence by commentators on the women's language.

The only question about the chorus that has received lengthy debate is whether or not Aeschylus portrays the women realistically, that is, whether their actions befit women who have been enslaved, particularly if Agamemnon were their enslaver. A. Sidgwick (1900), for example, identifies the chorus as "women captives accompanying Agamemnon on his return home from Troy at the end of the war".[3] In his view, the chorus are comprised of Trojan wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters. Therefore, Sidgwick faces the problem of a chorus who should hate Agamemnon and his house, but who "identify" with them.

The rationale that he offers to explain the sympathies of the chorus depends upon his interpretation of dramatic conventions:[4]

> But something must be allowed to the conventions of the drama: and there is nothing more common than that the household slaves (though obviously sprung from a hostile and conquered race) should identify themselves with the fortunes of the house, and so in this case hate the usurper, and give aid and counsel to the heir and avenger.

For Sidgwick, the question of realism in Aeschylus' portrayal of the women is, in spite of his belief in their Trojan background, less one of an accurate representation of their political views than of a depiction of their status as "conventional" slaves performing duties traditionally assigned to female servants. Sidgwick appears to believe that Aeschylus preferred his portrait of the chorus to remain faithful to Sidgwick's view of tragic stage convention.[5] Nevertheless, by identifying the chorus as Trojan, he fueled a debate among scholars of his own generation over the women's function in Choephori.

In the following year (1901), T.G. Tucker, realizing the contradiction in Sidgwick's argument, asserts that the chorus of serving women are not Trojan:[6]

> It is contrary to the probabilities, since captives newly brought from Troy by a master who was slain on the day of his arrival at home would hardly identify themselves so keenly with him and with the past and present fortunes of the house.

In other words, Aeschylus portrays the chorus as playing a dramatically realistic role, but one that assumes the women had been slaves resident in the household of Agamemnon long

before Troy. Tucker describes them as "having one been under the happier régime of the house, at a time when Agamemnon and his children were dwelling in it".[7] He sees no difficulty in a chorus acting and speaking in a manner which expresses loyalty to members of a family that has protected them both physically and socially.

Nevertheless, Tucker's idea about the background of the chorus is derived from his misreading of the following sequence of lines. In line 170 the women refer to themselves as παλαιὰ ("aged") in order to use their status as elders to convince Electra to follow their advice. Tucker takes this description out of context and uses it to refer to how long the women have lived in the house -- an unconvincing argument. Similarly, in 74 ff., Tucker uses the chorus' description of having been taken from their paternal home as proof of how long the chorus have lived in Agamemnon's House -- a second unconvincing argument. In connection with this argument, he also describes the women as αἰχμαλωτίδες ("spear-caught"), an epithet the women never use of themselves.[8] By emphasizing in "spear-caught" the chorus' memory of the violent act that transformed them into slaves, Tucker really undercuts his own argument that the women live "happily in the house". Finally, Tucker completely ignores the textual evidence which Sidgwick had used to defend his view of the Trojan identity of the chorus.[9] Since Tucker believes that the chorus are slaves captured in battle, it should follow that their families have been killed, if not by Agamemnon himself,

then by predecessors of his line, warriors whose harsh and indifferent treatment of women was embodied by Agamemnon and his swaggering masculinity at home. While the hatred that a slave may bear towards a master can mellow with the passage of time, in Choephori Aeschylus' slave women admit to attempts "to conquer " (literally, "to become master of") a bitter hatred as the only means of enduring a life that is out of their control (78-81).[10]

Even J.T. Sheppard (1927), who, like Sidgwick, Verrall, and others, focuses his commentary on Orestes, recognizes the possibility of deep-seated resentment in the chorus, for he refers to them as "savage Trojan women" and "vindictive".[11] Thus, both Tucker and Sheppard have, each in his own way, prepared for the concern of this thesis with a chorus who use their behaviour as mourners to conceal bitterness of another sort: while urging Electra and Orestes to give physical expression to the chorus' hatred of some members of the household, the women can carry out their own hidden hatred against other members of the household.[12]

Anne Lebeck (1971) marks a new interest in the chorus of Choephori by finding "traditional gestures of mourning mingle[d] with cries of personal misfortune" in the first strophe of the parodos.[13] Lebeck is clearly suggesting that the chorus has a more complex dramatic function that merely serving as a lyric voice intermingling with those of the more dominant brother and sister.[14]

In spite of such a bold reference to the personal cries of the chorus, Lebeck, too, like scholars before her, does not thoroughly examine the implication of her statement, namely, that the chorus may exercise an independent role. Such a chorus can interact with others, but can also act as a well-rounded character, psychologically and emotionally. She regards the women as "blending their own misfortunes with that of Agamemnon".[15] In fact, neither Lebeck nor any contemporary scholar is willing to analyze the chorus' speeches in a way that would attempt to understand why the women would unite fitting cries of mourning and apparently inappropriate "cries of personal misfortune".

In one of the most recent studies on Choephori, Otis Kopff (1981) in Cosmos and Tragedy fails to examine the chorus' words and calls them "female partners (serving-women) of Electra", "more royalist than the king"; not only have the women's words disappeared, but they have also been transformed into an abstraction: they are "the single-minded spur of both Electra and Orestes".[16]

Similarly, Lois Spatz (1982) dismisses the chorus in one contradictory sentence:[17]

> ..[they] are only foreign women who are war captives from Troy, fiercely loyal to Agamemnon and his children and passionately committed to the principles of the blood-vendetta, but cowed by the tyranny of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. (Underscore added)

There is one contemporary scholar who has rejected the weight of tradition on the role of the chorus and his comments

have inspired much of the work to be carried on in this thesis. Philip Vellacott (1983) in The Logic of Tragedy recognizes the dominant and destructive potential of the chorus in their relationship with Electra and Orestes. Unlike previous scholars, Vellacott associates the women with the cause of Electra. In his view, the chorus' resentment is Electra's resentment in that the former's hatred of Clytemnestra and devotion to Agamemnon stem from their sympathy for Electra. Because both women feel betrayed by the House, they hate it. For Vellacott, the similarity between the women is further seen in the way in which both Electra and the chorus describe themselves as slaves (cf. 77 and 135). Thus, Vellacott's identification of the chorus with Electra explains to him how the chorus can utter words that support Electra's love for her father. For Vellacott, the chorus serve as a mirror image of Electra; in fact, they foreshadow in their suffering as slaves the future that Electra sees before her.[18]

However perceptive and innovative Vellacott's approach to the chorus is, he remains unwilling to take a further step and to examine how the role the chorus play as ritual accomplice with Electra and Orestes in a murder-plot can be seen to imply a personal motivation as well.

In the most recent commentary on Choephori, A.F. Garvie (1986) accepts Schadewaldt's description of "the comforting and counselling role of the Chorus" (vis-à-vis Electra and Orestes).[19]

Garvie views the chorus of slave women acting primarily as "conventional representatives of Argos itself".[20] Whereas for earlier scholars "conventionality" had turned the chorus into women who mourn not only because the rules of the tragic stage theatre demand it, but also because they are loyal to the family, "conventionality" now turns the chorus into women who play a civic role that is never made explicit in the play.[21] Garvie brings scholarship full circle to Verrall by observing that the chorus "..though prisoners..are loyal to Agamemnon" and they display, he adds, certainly in the first strophe of the parodos, "the traditional behaviour of mourners".[22]

This summary of the major contributions to an understanding of the role of the chorus in Choephori has demonstrated that scholars are generally reluctant to accept the chorus as a collective dramatic character deserving of examination on their own merits. As I have shown, the women have been described as "conventional", "typical female mourners", "loyal", "savage", "vindictive", "cowed", and all these descriptions assume that the chorus are of secondary importance to the meaning of the play. The descriptions are often contradictory and none of them carries the authority of the Greek text.

The present thesis argues that the chorus, while certainly acting in conjunction with the purposes of Orestes and Electra, exhibit, though often covertly, attitudes and ideas that reveal objectives of their own. It will be shown, from a close reading

of all of the choral odes and major passages of dialogue, especially the kommos (306-478), that the chorus of Choephori function as a self-contained and psychologically well-developed dramatic character, equal in the intensity of their language and action to the two principal actors of the play.

Chapter Two studies the parodos and then the kommos in order to examine the methods by which the chorus, in the guise of mourners, influence Electra and Orestes to an act of vengeance that also serves the women's own desire for revenge. The frequence of ambiguous references to "violated beds", "incurable suffering", and "blood stroke for the stroke of blood" make it possible for the audience to hear the intertwining of the chorus' cause with that of Orestes and Electra. In this section of the play, the chorus often allude to the severe personal dangers inherent in the killing of kin and to the already weakened condition of the male blood-line of the House of Pelops. At the same time, however, as my examination of the major images and themes suggests, the women continually urge Orestes to believe in the "Justice" of matricide, an act that must inevitably threaten his own life and, consequently, the continuation of the royal line. By the conclusion of the kommos, the chorus have prepared Orestes to carry out acts of kin-killing, but Electra does not take part in the actual murders. Throughout the kommos, the chorus assume a privileged position as teacher of the royal children. When the children falter or grow too boastful, the chorus do more than merely serve as a lyric

back-drop to the songs of lamentation sung by the brother and sister. While appearing to support Orestes and Electra, the women really undermine and threaten to destroy the continuation of patrilineal descent in the House of Pelops.

Chapter Three studies a significant interlude (479-585) between the kommos, where Orestes utters his determination to kill, and the scenes where he commits kin-murder. During this intervening passage, Orestes assumes the role of prophet, divining for the chorus his metamorphosis into the snake-son of his monstrous mother. The chorus' description of Clytemnestra's nightmares of a snake suckling at her breast is an integral part of their attempt to ensure Orestes' sense of the "Justice" of the murders he is about to commit.

Chapter Four examines the remainder of the play (585-1075) from two distinct, yet related, approaches. One of the major themes and imagistic patterns that runs through the three choral odes of Choephori (585-651; 783-838, and 931-971), enlarges and refines the chorus' view of the bringer of vengeance as a dehumanized agent of the Furies. The most common image in the chorus' discussion of this concept is that of the snake, the monster of Clytemnestra's dream. The women continually reflect on Orestes from this perspective. It is ironic that when they encourage Cilissa (766-782) and, later, Aegisthus (847-868) to actions that cripple the ability of these individuals to warn the household of danger or to take measures for self-protection, the

women, in 'aiding and abetting' Orestes, become, for a moment, personfications of the masculine snake-beast Orestes becomes.

Chapter Five considers whether Aeschylus is misogynistic in his portrayal of the chorus. The recent work of the feminist classicist, Froma Zeitlin, will provide a focus for argument.

Footnotes

1. The date of each scholar's work on Choephori is placed in brackets in the main body of the text in order to assist readers in seeing the chronological order of critical viewpoints.
Unless otherwise stated, all translations of the Greek are my own, and are based on the late Sir Denys Page's Oxford Classical Text of 1972.

2. A.W. Verrall, The 'Choephori' of Aeschylus (London: MacMillan and Co., 1893), p. xi.

3. A. Sidgwick, Aeschylus, Choephori (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), p. xvii.

4. Ibid.

5. Sidgwick's idea about the conventional role of the chorus has been reiterated by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, who, in The Libation Bearers by Aeschylus (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1970), pp. 3-4, adds:

> The sex and station of the Chorus render it especially suited to utter the bitter lamentation for Agamemnon's fate and for the tyranny of the usurpers in the first half of the play. Likewise, in the second half the Chorus is well suited to utter the passionate prayers for the victory and for the preservation of Orestes.

6. T.G. Tucker, The Choephori of Aeschylus (Cambridge: University Press, 1901), p. 4.

7. Ibid, p. 5.

8. Ibid, pp. 4-5.

9. Sidgwick, p. xvii, says:

> ..the Scholiast clearly understands them to be [Trojan captive women]..This is further confirmed by the passage 425-428, where they lament 'in the Arian and Kissian (i.e. Asiatic fashion.'

10. The text of this passage is corrupt. Scholars have offered various interpretations of lines 77-80, in particular, of the terms ἀρχάς and βίου. Ἀρχάς has been translated as "rulers" and "beginning" (cf. the commentaries of Garvie, Tucker, and Sidgwick). Some scholars have replaced βίου with βία or they have completely deleted the word (cf. the commentaries of Thomson and Lloyd-Jones). The general sense is well translated by R. Lattimore, The Oresteia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953):

> And mine it is to wrench my will, and consent
> to their commands, right or wrong,
> to beat down my edged hate. (79-81)

11. J.T. Sheppard, Aeschylus and Sophocles (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), pp. 34 and 36.

12. James C. Hogan, A Commentary on The Complete Greek Tragedies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 107, also agrees with Verrall, Lloyd-Jones, and Sidgwick on the conventional role of the chorus and he describes them as "slaves in the house, perhaps brought back by Agamemnon from Troy (76 ff). From the outset their sympathy is with Electra".
George Thomson, The Oresteia of Aeschylus (Cambridge: University Press, 1938), Vol. 1, p. 34, also views the women as Trojan:

> ..[T]he women reveal their own identity - they are captives from the sack of Troy. They obey their masters by compulsion; their goodwill is reserved for the avenger, when he comes.

13. Anne Lebeck, The Oresteia (Washington: Center for Hellenic Studies, 1971), p. 98. The interest is new to Choephori, but not to ancient Greek literature. Cf. Homer, Il . 19.282 ff. where slave women publicly mourn Patrocles, but are concerned with their own suffering. Briseis is the only one who, in the poet's words, truly mourns Patrocles.
In later chapters, I refer to another work by Lebeck entitled "The First Stasimon of Aeschylus' Choephori: Myth and Mirror Image", CP 62 (1967), 182-185. Hereafter, references to the article will be to Lebeck, "The First Stasimon" and citations to the book will be to Lebeck, Oresteia.

14. Maarit Kaimio points out in The Chorus of Greek Drama within the Light of the Person and Number Used (Helsinki 1970 = Comment. human. litt. 46), p. 92:

> The chorus employ the first person singular in reflective passages where they give their opinion of an actor, or in a more generally reflective tone, sum up their personal attitude.

A.F. Garvie in his commentary on Choephori accepts Kaimio's argument:

> In Aeschylus the Chorus often begin and end (cf. 81) a song with a first person singular expression of emotion, so that their role in the drama is emphasized. (p. 55)

15. Lebeck, p. 99.

16. Otis Kopff, Cosmos and Tragedy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981), p. 69.

17. Lois Spatz, Aeschylus (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. 117.

18. Philip Vellacott, The Logic of Tragedy (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1984), pp. 107 ff.

19. A.F. Garvie, Aeschylus, Choephori (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 122.

20. Ibid, p. 53.

21. Although Garvie describes the chorus as "conventional representatives of Argos itself" (p. 53), it is Orestes, it should be remembered, who introduces the problem of political motivation in the third play of the trilogy. See, for example, lines 287-291, when Orestes says:

> καὶ νῦν ἀγνοῦ στόματος εὐφήμως καλῶ
> χώραν ἄνασσαν τῆσδ' Ἀθηναίαν ἐμοὶ
> μολεῖν ἀρωγόν· κτήσεται δ' ἄνευ δορὸς
> αὐτὸν τε καὶ γῆν καὶ τὸν Ἀργεῖον λεὼν
> πιστὸν δικαίως ἐς τὸ πᾶν τε σύμμαχον.
>
> I call upon Athene, queen of this land, to come and rescue me. She, without work of her spear, shall win myself and all my land and all the Argive host.

And Athena at lines 681-684:

> κλύοιτ' ἄν ἤδη θεσμόν, Ἀττικὰὼ λεώς,
> πρώτας δίκας κρίνοντες αἵματος χυτοῦ.
> ἔσται δε καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν Αἰγεως στρατῳ
> αἰεὶ δικαστῶν τοῦτο βουλευτήριον.
>
> If it please you, men of Attica, hear my decree now, on this first case of bloodletting I have judged. For Aegeus' population, this forevermore shall be the ground where justices deliberate.

And Orestes at lines 754-758:

> ὦ Παλλὰς, ὦ σώσασα τοὺς ἐμοὺς δόμους.
> γαίας πατρῴας ἐστερημένον σύ τοι
> κατῴκισάς με· καί τις Ἑλλήνων ἐρεῖ,
> Ἀργεῖος ἀνὴρ αὖθις ἔν τε χρήμασιν
> οἰκεῖ πατρῴοις..
>
> Pallas Athene, you have kept my house alive.
> When I had lost the land of my fathers you gave me
> a place to live. Among the Hellenes they shall
> say: 'A man of Argos lives again in the estates of
> his father...'

Above passages are translated by R. Lattimore, pp. 145, 159, and 162, respectively.

22. Garvie, p. 54.

CHAPTER TWO

"THE STERN RIGOUR OF BLOOD FOR BLOOD".[1]

The parodos of Cheophori marks a dramatic moment in the play. The term refers to the chorus' first entrance, as well as to the first ode they sing.[2] It follows a short prologue in which Orestes introduces the chorus to his silent companion, Pylades.

This chapter begins with an examination of the structure, language, and images in the parodos in order to show the ways in which the chorus of slave women use their position as ritual mourners both to express and to carry out their desire for vengeance against the House of Pelops.

PROLOGUE (1-21)

Orestes sets the tone when he describes the chorus in lines 13-14 as "this assembly of women conspicuous in their dark robes" (ἥδ' ὁμήγυρις στείχει γυναικῶν φάρεσιν μελαγχίμοις πρέπουσα) and as "women who bring libations as appeasement to the dead below" (χοὰς φερούσαις, νερτέροις μειλίγματα, 10-11 and 15). Orestes' emphasis is on the outward appearance of the women, and he engages in a form of image-making when he uses words like προσεικάζω and ἐπεικάσας (12 and 14). In addition, his rhetorical questions also suggest that, in his mind, the women may not necessarily be what their outward appearance projects. The term he uses to describe their apparel

(μελαγχίμοις) suggests the possibility that their intentions may be as dark as their robes. There is an obvious assonance in μελαγχίμοις and μέλαν αἷμα ("dark blood"). Aeschylus also uses a similar word, μελαγχίτων in Persians (114) to describe a "gloomy" heart. The word for "robes" (φάρεσιν) can refer to a "woven web" or a "shroud", both of which are imagistic reminders of Agamemnon's death robe.[3] Orestes adds to the impression he creates about the chorus of slave women by urging Pylades in lines 20-21 to withdraw with him "so that [Orestes] may learn truly who this band of women are who are turning towards [the grave]".[4] In spite of the fact that he recognizes his sister Electra among the chorus of slave women, this does not mean that Orestes automatically assumes their loyalty to the House.

Nor, in fact, does Orestes connect his sister with any words suggestive of her devotion to his father's house. Whether or not the audience includes Electra in the plural reference in line 15 to females about to pour offerings as "honeyed charms" to the spirits of the dead, even when she is referred to alone in a separate line, Orestes linguistically identifies his sister with the chorus: both appear to him as "conspicuous" (πρέπουσα and πρέπουσαν, 12 and 18); and both are excluded from references Orestes makes to his own plans for vengeance.[5]

In describing the chorus and Electra in terms which highlight the mysteriousness of their visual appearance, Orestes hints of the possible deceitfulness of simple appearance. Thus, even before these women have spoken a single word, neither their black robes of

mourning nor the drink offerings they carry seem to convince Orestes of their intention to mourn Agamemnon sincerely. Most importantly, Orestes shows his own wariness of the women who represent the household by hiding himself so that he can overhear their plans.

PARODOS (22-83)

The parodos may be divided into two strophes and two antistrophes of equal length (22-31 and 32-41); there are also two shorter units, strophe and antistrophe gamma (42-53, 54-65) followed by an epode which is filled with textual difficulties (75-83). Lebeck correctly sees the organization of the parodos as dominated by ring composition, a pattern formed through the recurrence of key words and the metaphor of blood. She traces blood imagery from its first appearance in line 48, with "blood failling on the ground" (πεσόντος αἵματος πέδοι), to line 67 "avenging gore freezes" (τίτας φόνος πέπηγεν), and, then, she relates the literal description of Agamemnon's frozen blood to the figurative image of the chorus "frozen by sorrows kept concealed".[6] Lebeck's perception of a cyclical movement in the parodos is an important one, and it can be expanded to include at least four other patterns of terms and metaphors that are connected with the metaphor of blood.

In the first part of this chapter, I will study the links between blood imagery (φόνος); striking (πεπληγμένων); rending

(ἀμυγμοῖς, λαιδες); hatred (κότος, στύγος); military violence (ἄμαχον, ἀδάματον, ἀπόλεμον), and, finally, darkness (δνόφοι). It is significant that all five sets of images are also used in Agamemnon to portray the dual aspects of Clytemnestra and Cassandra as women who are both victim and prophetess of doom. This duality in the female image carries over, I believe, into the portrayal of the chorus of Choephori; it is a key to understanding their subtle and divided nature.

According to Lebeck, the chorus of serving women "introduce both themes of lamentation as well as retribution" through the metaphor of blood.[7] What she does not note is that this metaphor begins as early as line 23, when the women combine their actions of ritual lamentation with the action of bloodying their cheeks. The disfiguring of skin would not only be striking to the Athenian audience, for whom such rites of self-flagellation had been outlawed since the time of Solon, but it also dramatizes the extent to which the women are prepared to inflict pain, in this case upon themselves.[8] In effect, they are associating the flowing of libations with the flowing of their own blood.[9] They intermingle the wine, oils, and perfumes of lamentation with the flowing waters of their own life's blood.[10] Such a dramatic use of φόνος occurs in Agamemnon in contexts that also highlight female attitudes and actions. For example, Cassandra, slave of Agamemnon and prophetess of Apollo, describes the House of Pelops ambiguously as (1090-1093):[11]

ἆ ἆ·
μισόθεον μὲν οὖν, πολλὰ συνίστορα
αὐταφόνα κακὰ †καρτάναι†
ἀνδροσφαγεῖον καὶ πέδον ῥαντήριον.

A house hated by the gods and which
[correspondingly] hates the gods, one which
is cognizant of many evils of kindred murder,
a slaughter-house which drips with blood.

Whenever the term φόνος (which can be translated as "murder", "slaughter", "bloodshed", or "gore") occurs in Agamemnon, it usually refers to the murder of kin, an act which in Oresteia necessitates revenge by kin as well. Any member of the audience who is aware of the use of φόνος in Agamemnon to mean both the show of blood and the requirement of further bloodletting, should hear echoes in the slave women's first reference to blood in the parodos of Choephori.[12] The bloody fingernails that rend the cheeks of the chorus create too many channels and furrows and cuttings for the audience to regard them as signs of unambiguous lamentation, especially for a foreign master (24-25, see discussion below). In addition, the audience will recall that Clytemnestra in the first play defined her slaughter of Agamemnon perversely as the possible pouring of ritual libations (1395-1398). Just as Agamemnon was likened by his wife to a "mixing bowl full of evils" so, too, the chorus of Choephori pour out a mixture of libations from their own bowl over the grave of Agamemnon, renewing the audience's sense of the evils ever present in the House. The theme of the renewal of bloodshed and evil will be further developed by the chorus in lines 66 ff.

In strophe alpha (22031), the chorus associate the flowing of blood with the tearing of their own skin and the rending of their garments of mourning. Early in the strophe, the phrase "with sharp-handed beating" (ὀξύχειρι σὺν κότωι, 23) introduces a sequence of descriptions of the damage the chorus are doing to themselves and to their garments.[13] there is "linen-destroying" (λιναφθόροι, 27), "ripping of cloth" (λακίδες, 28), and, finally, "the breast-covering apparel of robes struck by events which bring no laughter" (πρόστερνοι στολμοὶ πέπλων ἀγελάστοις ξυμφοραῖς πεπληγμένων, 30-31).[14] The terms ὑφασμάτων ("woven robes-webs") and πεπληγμένων ("struck") recall for the audience violent moments in Agamemnon.

In that play, the chorus of Argive elders use ὑφάσμα twice (Agamemnon, 1492 and 1516) to lament a master murdered and caught in the spider-like woven web of Clytemnestra's death blows. Similarly, the action of striking with intent to kill is used by all three actors in Agamemnon.[15] First, Cassandra, foreseeing her own murder, as well as that of Agamemnon, prays for a "timely blow" (καιρίαν πληγήν); in so doing, she uses words which Agamemnon himself repeats when he is being stabbed to death by Clytemnestra (1343-1345):[16]

> Αγ. ὤμοι, πέπληγμαι καιρίαν πληγὴν ἔσω.
> Χο. σῖγα· τίς πληγὴν αὐτεῖ καιρίως οὐτασμένος;
> Αγ. ὤμοι μάλ' αὖθις δευτέραν πεπληγμένος.
>
> Ag. Alas, I am stricken by a timely blow within.
> Ch. Be silent, who is shouting about a blow, having been stricken mortally?
> Ag. Alas, once again I am stricken for a second time.

Clytemnestra takes an additional opportunity to strike Agamemnon twice again when, in recollection, she boasts to the chorus of elders (1379-1387):

ἕστηκα δ' ἔνθ' ἔπαισ' ἐπ' ἐξειργασμένοις
οὕτω δ' ἔπραξα, καὶ τάδ' οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι,
ὡς μήτε φεύγειν μήτ' ἀμύνεσθαι μόρον·
ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων,
περιστιχίζω, πλοῦτον εἵματος κακόν·
μεθῆκεν αὐτοῦ κῶλα, καὶ πεπτωκότι
τρίτην ἐπενδίδωμι, τοῦ κατὰ χθονὸς
Διὸς νεκρῶν σωτῆρος εὐκταίαν χάριν.

I stand here where I struck upon my actions.
Thus did I act, and I will not deny this, so that
he could neither flee from nor ward off doom. I
set about him a vast net like that for fishes,
an evil wealth of robe. And I strike him twice,
and with two deep groans he let go of his limbs
there, and I give him a third [blow] when he has
fallen by way of the thanks which had been vowed
for Zeus beneath the earth, saviour of corpses.

By the end of strophe alpha, therefore, the chorus have mixed into their songs and physical acts of lamentation language that resonates with darker implications drawn from the images in the first play of beating, tearing, the flowing of blood, and the pouring of one's life energy over those either dead or about to die.

Antistrophe alpha (32-41) emphasizes the dark and troubling images contained in the previous strophe by adding and juxtaposing the idea of "hatred" (κότος, στύγος). Not only do words of hatred frame the antistrophe, but they also form a theme repeated at two other points in the parodos. The chorus begin by relating hatred to darkness and females (32-36):[17]

τορὸς γὰρ ὀρθόδριξ [φόβος] δόμων
ὀνειρόμαντις ἐξ ὕπνου κότον πνέων
ἀωρόνυκτον ἀμβόα-
μα μυκόθεν ἔλακε περὶ φόβωι,
γυναικείοισιν ἐν
δάμασιν βαρὺς πίτνων·

> Shrill fear that makes hair stand on end, prophet
> of dreams of the house, while breathing hatred
> from sleep, cried aloud a loud shout in the dead
> of night from the inner chambers because of fear,
> falling heavily on women's chambers.

By connecting a prophet of dreams, first, to anger and, then, to night and women, the chorus bring to mind the role Cassandra had played in Agamemnon. Just as she, the prophetess of Apollo, had interpreted the dream visions she saw in the house as representing both past kin-murder and the future murders of herself and Agamemnon, so, too, the chorus of Choephori connect interpreters of dreams (here Clytemnestra's dream) with fears about their meaning, with feelings of anger, and with anticipation of murder (37-41).

Whenever hatred is mentioned in either Agamemnon or Choephori, it usually foreshadows the death of the person toward whom the hatred is directed. For example, when Cassandra foretells her death at the hands of Clytemnestra, the Trojan woman divines the reason to be the queen's hatred of her as a concubine of Agamemnon (1261-1263):[18]

> τεύχουσα κἀμοῦ μισθὸν ἐνθήσει κότῳ·
> ἐπεύχεται, θήγουσα φωτὶ φάσγανον,
> ἐμῆς ἀγωγῆς ἀντιτείσεσθαι φόνον.
>
> Weaving as a drug, she [Clytemnestra] will put me
> into her anger as payment; she vaunts as she whets
> a sword for her husband, that she will take a
> requital of my blood for my conveyance.

Strophe beta (44-53) contines the linkage among streams of blood, the fear of speaking too openly, and thoughts of death (46-48). Nevertheless, the chorus allude in lines 51-53 to a

"sunless hatred of mortals: darknesses which conceal the house with deaths of masters".[19] The audience is left to determine which masters are to be connected with the idea of death; logically, δεσποτᾶν θανάτοισι refers to the death of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but it could also refer to the royal brother and sister. There can be no uncertainty, however, about the chorus' demand for atonement by members of the House of Pelops.

When the women show the personal level of their hatred in the parodos, their words foreshadow new visions of death for those who control them (78-81). In Agamemnon, hatred was clearly a driving force behind the murder of kin and it continues to be so in Choephori. The chorus use personal hatred of their masters to inspire a similar hatred in a younger generation of royal masters, who will be hated in turn. They continually appeal to Orestes and Electra to remember the reasons why the latter should hate those who unfairly govern their lives and future hopes, namely, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

The hatred the chorus bear towards the House perfectly matches the depth of Clytemnestra's hatred of a tyrannical husband. One remembers the queen's retort to the chorus of elders as she boasts over the body of Agamemnon. She blames them for not recognizing the justice of hating and punishing a man who dared to sacrifice his own daughter (Agamemnon, 1411-1412). She implies that because of the unwillingness of the male chorus to act on behalf of the dead young female, Iphigenia, she, Clytemnestra, another female, has been

forced to use stealth in exacting due payment from an unjust husband. Similarly, the chorus of Choephori must use their female wiles to carry out their own vengeance against the House. The difference between Clytemnestra and the chorus of slave women is that the former, assuming a man-like role, acted on her own in exacting vengeance. The chorus of Choephori will have to carry out their vengeance through the queen's children.

Antistrophe beta (55-65) underlines the deceptive nature of the chorus' language. The women juxtapose military terms that are negated and, hence, seemingly innocuous, with a term that denotes the pious reverence owed to gods (σέβας) (55-58):

> σέβας δ' ἄμαχον ἀδάματον ἀπόλεμον τὸ πρίν
> δι' ὤτων φρενός τε δαμίας περαῖνον
> νῦν ἀφίσταται. φοβεῖ-
> ται δέ τις· τὸ δ' εὐτυχεῖν,
> τόδ' ἐν βροτοῖς θεός τε καὶ θεοῦ πλέον.
>
> A reverence to the gods not to be battled against,
> not to be conquered, and not to be warred against,
> one which formerly made its way through the ears
> and hearts of the people has now departed in revolt.
> And one is afraid. But prosperity, it is this that
> is a god among mortals, and even more than a god.

Many commentators agree with the scholiast that σέβας refers to the "majesty" of Agamemnon, but an examination of its appearance in the previous play, in this one, and elsewhere in Greek tragedy, indicates that it properly refers to the worship of gods by men.[20] In Agamemnon, for example, the chorus of Argive elders provide an instructive definition, one that also alludes to the impiety of Agamemnon, as well as to that of Paris (369-378):

..οὐκ ἔφα τις
θεοὺς βροτῶν ἀξιοῦσθαι μέλειν
ὅσοις ἀθίκτων χάρις
πατοῖθ'· ὁ δ' οὐκ εὐσεβής·
πέφανται δ' ἐγγόνοις
†ἀτολμήτων ἄρη†
πνεόντων μεῖζον ἢ δικαίως ,
φλεόντων δωμάτων ὑπέρφευ,
ὑπὲρ τὸ βέλτιστον·

Someone denies that the gods deign to care about mortals, for those whom grace of untouchable things is trampled upon. But he is not a pious man, and ruin comes upon descendants of over-daring men, when they breathe more greatly than is right, when their houses are teeming excessively, beyond what is best.

Like the chorus of Argive elders, the chorus of slave women condemn their rulers for a lack of reverence and an insatiable pursuit of wealth. In antistrophe beta both types of sacrilegious behaviour will bring about the downfall of men: "But prosperity, this among mortals is a god and more than a god" (τὸ δ' εὐτυχεῖν, τόδ' ἐν βροτοῖς θεός τε καὶ θεοῦ πλέον, 59-60). Not only is the tone of the chorus' statement a veiled form of sarcasm, but the women also go on to specify three female abstractions that will punish the hubris of such mortals: "the scale of Justice (Δίκη), pain (Ἄχη), and Night (Νύξ): (61-65).[21] The chorus are warning all members of the House about the family's reputation for arrogance and impiety: the combination of these two misconceptions about mortal power led Agamemnon to kill his daughter; they led Clytemnestra to kill her husband; and, now, they become the focus of the chorus' implied rejection of the godless household of their masters.[22] In antistrophe beta, the military language emphasizing

the importance of reverence also implicitly attacks past irreligious conduct of members of the House.

Strophe gamma (66-74) concentrates upon the theme of disease, always a consequence of impious or hubristic acts in the House. The women assert that there is no cure, no means of atonement, no method of stopping "the endless flow of blood" (66-72). Earlier in line 48 they had questioned whether atonement for blood falling to the ground was possible, but here they reiterate the idea that bloodshed always results in more bloodshed. For the chorus, bloodshed is equivalent to the "violation of bridal beds" (θιγόντι δ' οὔτι νυμφικῶν ἑδωλίων, 71), an idea that adds an intensely personal (because it is sexual and self-revelatory) level to the metaphor of blood. The women identify murder with a crime committed by males against females, thus highlighting one of the major themes of the trilogy: the struggle between men and women for control of the House.

Many commentators from Sidgwick to Garvie interpret line 71 as establishing a "comparison between Virginity and Loss of Life; loss of each is irrevocable".[23] If, however, the phrase "violation of bridal beds" simply refers to the loss of virginity, then the metaphor of bloodshed is again intensified on a visual level: the loss of virginity is marked by the staining of blood and so, too, is the loss of life in Oresteia. In addition, if one accepts that the chorus mean the loss of virginity alluded to in the first play, then the only male who may have violated beds of virgins is

Agamemnon: the husband of Clytemnestra made Cassandra his concubine and Clytemnestra herself referred to him as "her destroyer" and "honey of the Chryseises [slave-concubines] under [the walls of] Ilium" (Agamemnon, 1438-1439). The audience can only speculate on the relationship Agamemnon may have had with members of the chorus of Choephori, either before he left for Troy or while he victimized them at Troy. All the audience knows for certain is that the women, at some point earlier in their lives, had been violently removed from their paternal homes, either by Agamemnon himself or by his male ancestors. Regardless of who violated their bridal beds, these women condemn the House for having inflicted a servile status upon them (76-77). In my view, the chorus contain traits of Cassandra and Clytemnestra. Physically, both Cassandra and the chorus are slaves to the will and, perhaps, even to the body of Agamemnon. Psychologically, Cassandra, Clytemnestra, and the chorus of Choephori draw upon their own immediate experiences of the destructive effects upon females of war, the death of kin, the loss or diminution of family unity, and physical violation, as sources of their loathing for Agamemnon. All of these women, though unrelated in blood, have suffered because of men, impious men; suffering has turned each of them into what the chorus call Clytemnestra: the "godless woman" (δύσθεος γυνά, 46).

The epode (75-83) provides an abbreviated biography of the chorus, and brings together in this personal account the themes

of the women's hatred of the House (78-81) and of "blood that no longer flows, but stands congealed" (83).

The metaphor of blood is clearly related to the experience of females and, as in antistrophe beta, the chorus appear to pay lip service to the House (75-81):[24]

> ἐμοὶ δ', ἀνάγκαν γὰρ ἀμφίπτολιν
> θεοὶ προσήνεγκαν, ἐκ γὰρ οἴκων
> πατρώιον δούλιόν μ' ἐσάγον αἶσαβμ
> δίκαια καὶ μὴ δίκαια,
> πρέποντ' ἀρχὰς βίου,
> βίαι φερομένων αἰνέσαι πικρῶν φρενῶν
> στύγος κρατούσηι·
>
> But, as for me, (for the gods have brought forth the necessity of a city besieged), from my paternal homes, they have led me to a servile fate. It is fitting for me, conquering the hatred of my bitter heart, to approve, when matters are borne by violent force, the just and unjust acts of the rulers of my life.

Although, as I observed in Chapter One, Garvie views the role of the chorus as providing a political statement on behalf of Argos, nevertheless, he admits one difficulty: "It is odd that Aeschylus should here stress their status as prisoners-of-war (75-7)".[25] The chorus emphasize their servile condition, but the choice of the word αἰνέσαι is difficult to entertain without questioning its meaning. Αἰνέσαι can mean "to acquiese in" or "to sit still for". On the other hand, it can also mean "to praise" or "to approve". The women, therefore, could be saying that they publicly approve their masters' actions, but, in view of their earlier warnings about the dangers inherent in impious behaviour, their reference to "unjust acts" condemns, as well as praises. The women describe

their own efforts to "conquer" a bitter hatred, and these are hardly the words of complacent slaves or docile admirers of the unjust acts of the rulers of their lives. The chorus resemble Clytemnestra, because they use slightly ambiguous words like αἰνέσαι to say one thing, while making the audience think of the opposite.

The chorus conclude the epode with a statement that is emblematic of the threat they pose to the House as mourners: "I weep under veils because of the wanton [pointless?] acts of [my] masters, while I am froxen with hidden griefs" (δακρύω δ' ὑφ' εἱμάτων ματαίοισι δεσποτᾶν τύχαις, κρυφαίοις πένθεσιν παχνουμένα, 81-83).[26] One of the most ambiguous cries of lamentation uttered under veils is the chorus' allusion to "wanton acts". Unlike other scholars, I believe the chorus are, inter alia, alluding to the impious sexual conduct of Agamemnon.[27] When Clytemnestra herself is about to die, she reminds Orestes, her son, of Agamemnon's μάτας (917); she demands that her son recognize the origin of a mother's and wife's sexual misconduct as arising from that of her husband's. Since the chorus have just finished comparing sexual crimes committed by males against females to bloodshed, the words ματαίοισι δεσποτᾶν τύχαις can, in my view, then refer primarily to the sexual behaviour of Agamemnon.

It is, therefore, the lust of a male which is the main cause of the chorus' weeping in secret. The "vain" and "wanton sexual acts of [their] masters" have resulted in a chorus who describe themselves as "frozen with hidden griefs" (83). In so speaking, the chorus do

not mean that they are weeping for Agamemnon's pointless death and thereby find solace in ambiguous language, but rather that they are using such language to renew the cycle of avenging bloodshed in the House. This is how they, as "godless women", can attack the House from within.

As the parodos comes to an end, the hateful words of the women flow back to thoughts of blood, violence, tears, garments that conceal, deeds that reveal impiety, and masters who must make atonement. The intertwining of mourning with desire for vengeance, a theme which the chorus introduced in the parodos, continues through the play and reaches its climax in the kommos, where the women influence the children to act as their surrogate, carrying out both the children's and the chorus' own desire for vengeance against the House. It will, therefore, be useful to examine the stichomythia (dialogue) between the chorus and Electra before turning to the kommos itself.

STICHOMYTHIA (106-123)

Just as the chorus have transformed a song of lamentation in the parodos into a song of retribution, now, in the stichomythia, they turn Electra's song of lamentation into another song of retribution.[28] In place of giving advice to Electra, the chorus first rouse her hatred for Aegisthus. When Electra asks the chorus to identify the person whom the prayer is to comfort, thus admitting

her need for personal support ("Shall I pray these things both for me and for you?"), the women reply "It is for you yourself, having learned these things, to consider [them]" (111-112).

This dialogue is the first of several moments in the play where the chorus appear both to co-operate with, that is, to assist or to hearten Electra and/or Orestes, and, at the same time, to distance themselves from the action to be undertaken because of their advice. The ambiguity of their reply encourages Electra to assume their loyalty and support. Yet the audience senses its negative implications, too. By throwing the responsibility of prayer back upon Electra, the chorus are forcing her not only "to consider", but also "to speak out" (φράσαι) what she has learned from them. Electra needs the physical and emotional support of these females who, without her knowledge, are transforming her into the public spokesman of their hatred and desire for vengeance. In effect, the chorus abrogate the rights of a pedagogue (116-123):[29]

Ηλ. εὖ τοῦτο, κἀφρένωσας οὐχ ἥκιστά με.
Χο. τοῖς αἰτίοις νυν τοῦ φόνου μεμνημένη
Ηλ. τί φῶ; δίδαξον ἄπειρον ἐξηγουμένη.
Χο. ἐλθεῖν τιν' αὐτοῖς δαίμον' ἢ βροτῶν τινα.
Ηλ. πότερα δικαστὴν ἢ δικηφόρον λέγεις;
Χο. ἁπλωστὶ φράζουσ', ὅστις ἀνταποκτενεῖ.
Ηλ. καὶ ταῦτά μοὐστὶν εὐσεβῆ θεῶν πάρα;
Χο. πῶς δ' οὔ, τὸν ἐχθρὸν ἀνταμείβεσθαι κακοῖς;

El. This [is] well [said]. You have instructed me very well.
Ch. Be mindful of those responsible for bloodshed.
El. What am I to say? Teach me who is inexperienced by leading me out of it.
Ch. [Pray for] some divinity or mortal to come against them.
El. Are you speaking of a judge or an avenger?
Ch. Say simply, whoever will kill in return [for killing].

El. And is this a pious thing for me to ask from the gods?
Ch. Surely it is [pious] to requite the enemy for [with, or by means of] evils.

Such a chorus, who do not distinguish between δικαστὴν ("judge") and δικηφόρον (avenger), instruct Electra on the lesson of Δίκη ("Justice"): it is pious, they say, to kill one's enemies, even if those enemies consist of kin -- an apparent religious contradiction to their own definition of σέβας in the parodos.

Similarly, after Electra makes her prayer to chthonic Hermes and pours libations over Agamemnon's tomb, the chorus' prayer, which outlines the ritual just completed by Electra, re-defines her actions in language that guides her to see the pouring of libations as a powerful deed, possibly efficacious against evils, and to be associated with military defence-works, and the threat of darkness and death (152-163):[30]

ἵετε δάκρυ καναχὲς ὀλόμενον
ὀλομένωι δεσπόται
πρὸς ῥεῦμα τόδε κεδνῶν κακῶν τ'
ἀπότροπον, ἄγος [or ἄλγος] ἀπεύχετον
κεχυμένων χοᾶν.
κλύε δέ μοι σέβας, κλύ', ὦ δέσποτ', ἐξ
ἀμαυρᾶς φρενός.
ὀτοτοτοτοτοτοῖ·
ἵτω τις δορυσθενὴς ἀνὴρ
ἀναλυτὴρ δόμων †Σκυθιτά τ' ἐν χεροῖν
παλίντον' ἐν ἔργωι† βέλη 'πιπάλλων Ἄρης
σχέδια τ' αὐτόκωπα νωμῶν ξίφη.

Pour forth a plashing tear that has perished for a master who has perished, upon this bulwark of evils and averter of good things, hateful pollution [pain?] of poured libations. Hear me, hear, oh reverence, master, from a gloomy heart. ototototototoi, let a spear-strong man come, deliverer [dissolver?] of the house, Ares [god of war] brandishing Scythian bow bent in his hands in the act and wielding hilted swords in close combat.

This passage has caused much debate among scholars because of the obscurity of the women's language. If one accepts M's reading of the passage as translated above, the chorus review the pattern of central images they developed in the parodos in order to inflame Electra's hatred and to meld her will to their own. In teaching Electra the 'proper' way to pray, ironically with hateful words, the women get a vicarious pleasure in speaking the very words that mask their contempt for the House.

Scholars miss the point of the ambiguity of the women's words when they reverse the order of the words κακῶν κεδνῶν τ' ("of evils and of good things") in line 154, and read "this bulwark of goods and averter of evils".[31] In my opinion, unless the chorus are being facetious here, it does not make sense for them either to describe Agamemnon's tomb as a "bulwark which consists of evils" or to refer to the "deprecatory pollution of poured libations" as "an averter of good things", if they truly support Agamemnon and his children. If, however, the bitter hatred the women feel for their masters includes all members of the House of Pelops, then they would indeed regard Agamemnon's tomb as a military fortress, the walls of which require radical action by the living.

On the one hand, the women consider the pouring of libations to be a loathsome pollution, an act which in the parodos they had made equivalent to the shedding of blood that demands more bloodshed (66-74). Nevertheless, as captives and servants, the chorus are forced by their status to submit to further self-pollution even as

they join with Electra in pouring out libations. On the other hand, the pouring of libations is also their means of perverting the sacred ritual act of lamentation: it allows them to teach Electra to speak words of killing as a new form of prayerful and pious behaviour.[32]

Finally, the chorus' prayer for a spear-strong man to "loosen" the house, "an Ares", is equally ominous. The word ἀναλυτήρ can be viewed positively as "deliverer", and this will be the superficial image that the chorus teach Orestes to believe in. The term can also be used negatively to mean "loosener", that is "destroyer", and it is an epithet well-suited to the chorus' concept of Ares, a god of war who kills men by loosening their limbs.[33] For the women, Ares symbolizes their warrior, the one who will eventually wage their battle against the fortress of tomb and House; through Orestes, Ares will be their means of "loosening" the House' polluting hold on them.

Therefore, when the women invoke Agamemnon in prayer, calling him the epitome of "reverence" (σέβας), one recalls that in the parodos (55058), σέβας had connotations of the hubristic conduct of men, especially Agamemnon. Now, in lines 156-157, the chorus give an underhanded compliment to Agamemnon, first, by deleting his personal name, second, by replacing it with a questionable epithet of religious glory, third, by adding the common descriptor of "despot", and, finally, by reducing him to an existence as a "mere consciousness" (φρήν); he is a "weak" (ἀμαυράς) and possibly non-efficacious spirit, one incapable of being sensed, were it not, they imply, for their own

prayer.[34] It is paradoxical that just for a brief moment the women place Agamemnon in need of them, like a slave needing direction.

Long before the kommos, then, the recurrence or intensification of images begun in the parodos signals the threat the members of the chorus pose. Their raison d'être is hate which will be realized in the form of vengeance against the House of Pelops. Their equivocal language creates an image of a chorus who publicly reinforce Electra's desire to avenge her father's death, but who privately seek the means of eradicating Pelops' entire line. These are the women who, after the recognition scene, define Orestes and Electra not only as "children", the immediate descendants of Agamemnon, but also as would-be "saviours of [their] father's hearth" (264). The chorus are acting duplicitously here. They openly silence the children (σιγᾶθ', 265) and pretend to speak out on their behalf by wishing for the death of those who unjustly control the house. But the juxtaposition of two opposing participial nouns, the one denoting "rulers" (τοὺς κρατοῦντας), the other denoting the future of the rulers as "slain" (θανόντας),[35] and the graphic description of life's juices "oozing like pitch-black currents of flame" (ἐν κηκῖδι πισσήρει φλογός) create a dangerous picture for Electra and Orestes as young and would-be rulers of such a House. If the children succeed in their murder-plot, they, too, will take up in turn the dual roles of the rulers and the slain in a fated household, where lex talionis prevails. The opposing images of saviour and killer, ruler and slain, haunt the kommos as well.

KOMMOS (306-478)

According to Aristotle, a kommos is a song of lamentation, a threnody (death song) common to chorus and actor(s).[36] As noted in Chapter One, the kommos has been the center of most critical commentary in Choephori. After reviewing the major points made about the kommos by previous scholars, I shall discuss them in relation to my own views.

Recent commentary has been inspired by what is called 'the great debate' between Lesky and Schadewaldt. Garvie summarizes the debate as follows:[37]

> Lesky..argues that the principal function is to show us Orestes at first anxious and doubting, then making up his kind to a matricide which till now has been only in the background...Lesky's view then is that the kommos is dramatic and dynamic.
> For Schadewaldt..it is dramatically static, in that Orestes' decision is nowhere (until 899) a variable in the play, and there is never any doubt that he will do what he has come to do. His resolution is as fixed at the end...Schadewaldt argues that..in the kommos, it is the audience which experiences ever more clearly and intensely the necessity of matricide and becomes convinced that Agamemnon will hear his children's prayers.

As Garvie's review makes clear, for scholars the kommos is designed to reveal the ἦθος of Orestes and to study the nature of his tragic dilemma.[38] Winnington-Ingram, however, urges the audience to consider the structure of the scene as a signal to the prominence of the chorus:[39]

> It [the kommos] is lyric, and (though this has, strangely, been denied), in it the role of the chorus is of primary importance and in some degree governs its complex structure.

The chorus open, close, and serve as an interventionary force in the kommos. Garvie divides the scene into four sections: "..the first

(306-422) consists of four triads in each of which the strophe is sung by Orestes, the antistrophe by Electra, the two being separated by a stanza of the chorus". 'The chorus respond to Orestes and Electra in the second section; the third section is primarily triadic again and in the fourth the chorus sing a strophic pair'.[40]

The chorus begin by associating the great Fates (Μοῖραι) who are female, with another female, Justice (Δίκη) while, at the same time, reiterating the very lesson of an avenging Δίκη which they had earlier taught Electra in the stichomythia.[41] As the chorus pray that "a hateful tongue be fulfilled in return for another hateful tongue", and also that "Δίκη take payment for what is owed", and again that "bloody stroke be paid in return for bloody stroke" (309-313), one begins to hear strains of the cause of the Ἐρινύες ("Furies") mixed into the kommos. In Agamemnon, the audience recalls, Clytemnestra summarizes the "righteousness" (θέμις, 1431) of her vengeance as an act involving three female deities (Δίκη, Ἄτη and Ἐρινύς) on whose behalf she has slaughtered Agamemnon, thus fulfilling his Μοῖρα. Later, in Eumenides (334), the Ἐρινύες also associate themselves with Μοῖρα— and the blood due to earth when kin kill kin. In Choephori, even as the chorus remind Orestes and Electra of the ancient lesson that the "doer must pay" (313), the women are also emphasizing the endless murderous demands of lex talionis (306-313).[42]

The effect of this ancient law is seen in Orestes' response in strophe alpha (315-322). But, as his part in the kommos develops, the chorus approach the male pupil differently from their female pupil.

Orestes will be encouraged to assume an active role in the coming vengeance and Electra will become the passive recipient of ideas that she is permitted to voice, but not to carry out in action. The first example of Orestes' awareness of his greater participation is a statement made while invoking his "unhappy" [or "ruined") "father" (αἰνόπατερ, 315). Orestes asks Agamemnon to clarify what he, as the son, can say or do (316) to bring the light of Moῖρα (319) in place of the darkness of his father's tomb. By speaking in such terms, Orestes is already assuming the role of the chorus' "loosener", an Ares in front of the fortress of the tomb. Part of his self-confidence arises, perhaps, from having been reminded of the obligations of lex talionis in line 312, a lesson which carries with it, as the chorus assert here, the weight of a "thrice-aged saying" (τριγέρων μῦθος).

The chorus reply for Agamemnon in strophe beta (323-330) by explaining that the "essence" (φρόνημα) of a man slain, and one whose body has been cremated, lives on beyond the fire. In fact, in Agamemnon's case, fire has transformed his essence into wrath. This essence is the vengeful spirit of Agamemnon that resides within the fortress of his tomb. Although, as Garvie asserts, Orestes in lines 327-329 hears the story of an Agamemnon who is both lamented as dead and who has returned as avenger, the present tense of the two participles and their juxtaposition with the earlier aorist (past) participle suggest that the story can apply to Orestes as well. He, too, is being lamented by the chorus. All the while he is psychologically maturing in the kommos into a sense of responsibility to kill mother

and her paramour, he is also figuratively "dying" (θνήισκων). He will kill kin as surely as did his "dead" (θανόντος) father, Agamemnon, and, just as surely, Orestes will become the object of the Furies' hunt in Eumenides.

There is a similar double entendre in the following line (329). In that line, although the chorus do not explicitly mention Clytemnestra, the collocation of the words πατέρων τε καὶ τεκοντῶν alerts the audience to the possibility of a contrast between males and females. Some commentators combine the words and translate them as "fathers who begat or sired children".[43] Others separate the words and take τεκοντῶν as a reference to ancestors. Lebeck argues, however, that τεκοντῶν refers to a mother.[44] The ambiguity created by the collocation of the two terms, separated only by the conjunctions τε καὶ , make it possible for the audience to think of the coming death of a mother who killed a father and who will, in turn, be killed by the father's son. If the parents of Orestes and Electra suffer the punishment of death, one may infer from the chorus' song that the same suffering awaits their offspring. The feminine resonances of τεκοντῶν are found again in line 330, where the chorus describe a lamentation that is "full of justice" (ἔνδικος).[45] In the context of the kommos, it is also a death song that hunts down murderers with the same keen-scentedness that Cassandra possessed in Agamemnon (1094).

Prompted by Electra's prayer to her father in antistrophe alpha (331-339), in which she questions the existence of an unconquerable ἄτα (339), the chorus allude to the possibility that a

god might cause very harmonious "loud sounds" (κελάδους). The women define these sounds as a παιαν, a newly-mixed φίλον ("kin" or "close friend").[46] Not only does κελάδος have military overtones as the din of fighting, but παιάν, too, has similar connotations.[47] Παιάν combines the opposing ideas of a military song chanted by soldiers as they are about to wage war with a song of the god of healing, Apollo. In the first play, however, the god has abandoned his prophetess, Cassandra by leading her to Argos, where destruction awaits her.[48] Cassandra mocks the god by suggesting connections between the name Apollo and the pun on his name which means "destroy" (1080-1082).[49] Παιάν also contains a pun on the Greek participle παίων ("striking"), which reminds Aeschylus' audience of the frequent vocabulary of striking and, in particular, of the death blows aimed at Agamemnon and Cassandra in the first play.

Finally, in using the image, "a newly-mixed φίλος", they anticipate Orestes' plan to enter the house disguised as a guest-friend bearing the news of the death of kin. Both Orestes and Clytemnestra exchange words about the duties of guest-friends in lines 705 and 709 and, in this way, Orestes begins to pour out from his bowl of evils. The chorus' image of a "newly-mixed φίλος" also looks back, as I noted earlier, to their own bowl from which flows a mixture of blood, libations, and evil thoughts (cf. Agamemnon's mixing bowl of evils in Agamemnon, 1397). The word φίλος most commonly denotes a close friend or a kinsperson; thus, it suggests in this passage the way in which Orestes, as a beloved son, will keep the cycle of kin-murder alive in the House of Pelops.

The chorus repeat this disconcering use of φίλος when Orestes in strophe gamma (345-353) utters the impossible wish that Agamemnon had died at Troy. In antistrophe beta (354-362) they redirect his wish by insisting that Agamemnon become "kin to his dead kin below" (φίλος φίλοισι). Because of descriptions contained in the first play, the dead kin below must include not only Iphigenia, slain by her father, but also Thyestes' children, slain by the father of Agamemnon. In the House of Pelops, kin-members are not sired to enjoy the pleasures of mutual love or friendship, but rather to become deadly enemies of one another, generation after generation. It is the implication of this abuse of φιλία that the chorus' lesson brings to the surface even while they add to the abuse of φιλία by encouraging the continuation of the cycle of the murder of kinfolk.[50]

In antistrophe gamma (363-372) when Electra utters a prayer that is the opposite of Orestes', namely, wishing that her father had not died at Troy, but that his murderers had, the chorus behave differently. In a condescending manner they call her "child" (παῖ) and portray her as a speaker of big and empty words (372-374).[51] They describe the hands of those who rule the house as unholy, adding that the children, too, have inherited rather impious hands (μᾶλλον γεγένηται), an important point which not all commentators have seen. On this partially corrupt passage Lebeck agrees with Rose and Groeneboom that the chorus are referring to the heinousness of the very crimes they are urging the children to commit: the murder of mother and cousin. Lebeck translates and comments:[52]

> "Impure are the hands of the mighty, the hated;
> and it has befallen the children still more."
> A crime more impious, a greater sacrilege, has fallen
> to the lot of Agamemnon's children than that of which
> his murderers are guilty.

But the primary reason for this ever-growing responsibility for commiting murder is contained in the verb γεγένηται: Orestes and Electra belong to the γένος ("family-line") of an accursed family. They are doomed to mature to the same predisposition (ἦθος) for hubris and kin-slaughter as their parents.

After Orestes in strophe delta (380-385) prays to Zeus to send up a "late-avenging ἄτα", the chorus in strophe epsilon (386-392) utter, for the first and only time in the kommos, a vindictive wish that they could "cry a song of triumph over a man smitten and a woman dead" (386-389).[53] In the parodos (80-81) the chorus spoke obliquely of attempts to repress and conquer hatred. Here, in the kommos, they boast openly of the "hatred of storm winds that blow in their hearts". Like a good pupil, Electra imitates the language of her pedagogue in antistrophe delta (394-399) by praying aloud that Zeus "cleave the heads [of her enemies]". Both her double exclamation of anger (φεῦ φεῦ) and her imitation of the chorus' prayer-like formula of lines 367 ff. show that she has learned the chorus' lesson of blood for blood by demaning violent justice to repay her for having suffered injustice (398). In fact, Electra calls upon Earth and other female vengeful spirits contained therein in language that echoes the chorus' earlier words (267-268).[54]

In lines 400-404, in order to ensure that Electra and Orestes recognize the "Justice" of their desire for vengeance, the chorus teach again the bloody law of an eye for an eye, a law whose parameters they had stated in lines 66-74 in the parodos:

> ἀλλὰ νόμος μὲν φονίας σταγόνας
> χυμένας ἐσ πέδον ἄλλο προσαιτεῖν
> αἷμα· βοᾶι γὰρ λοιγὸς Ἐρινύν
> παρὰ τῶν πρότερον φθιμένων ἄτην
> ἐτέραν ἐπάγουσαν ἐπ' ἄτηι.
>
> But it is a law that bloody drops falling on the ground demand another blood[letting]. For destruction shouts for a Fury from those who died earlier, [a gorgon-like female spirit of vengeance] who leads another ἄτη upon ἄτη.

Sider maintains that the chorus are reciting the code of the Furies.[55] The chorus, however, do not speak of Furies, but rather of a single Fury. Their careful selection of number allows the audience to identify the singular avenger with the person of the chorus who speak of themselves, for the most part, in the singular. Furthermore, the pattern of three female nouns, Ἐρινύν, a first, and then a second, ἄτη reminds us of the chorus' earlier vengeful triplet in the kommos (306-311). In that passage the chorus did not explicitly include the word Ἐρινύν in describing their ideas of vengeance; now they combine the drops of murdered kin's blood with the ancient female deity whose sole function is to bring justice upon those guilty of killing kin. She is the same female deity who, in a plural form, will track down the blood-polluted Orestes in the last play of the trilogy. When the chorus of Choephori describe "those who have died earlier" (403) in the House, it is important to note that they do not stop with the past.

Future deaths will come, including certainly Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus', but, in the context of the lesson the chorus are teaching about the power of γένος and ἦθος in the House of Pelops, kin-murder will always be renewed in this family. One wonders how clearly Electra and Orestes understand the personal implications of their role in renewing another cycle of bloodletting. In line 429 Orestes hints that he does because he connects the murder of his mother to his own death.[56]

The chorus waver for the first time in antistrophe epsilon (410-417), their sense of confidence shaken because Orestes openly despairs of being able, through his action, to end the cycle of "very powerful curses and dishonoured remnants of Atreus' house". For the chorus, it is one thing to endure Orestes' flashes of intuition about the dire consequences of the endless cycle of the murder of kin, but quite another to sense him withdrawing from his avenging role out of fear and desperation. In order to draw Orestes away from further thoughts about personal risk and the hopelessness of his cause, the chorus speak in general terms, letting him be the "teacher" of their words of sorrow and lamentation. In this way, they hide the dark and stormy anxiety he arouses in them by his hesitation, covering it with a mask of empathy for his concerns.[57] At the end of the antistrophe, by encouraging Orestes to think more confidently about himself, the chorus, whose "heart was earlier fed by griefs all lifelong" (26), have now regained their own self-confidence, too (415-417).

When Electra repeats her request for instruction in antistrophe zeta (418-422), her words betray the difference between the female and male offspring of Agamemnon. The chorus play on her different psychological outlook whenever they respond to her with counsel. Here, as earlier in the play (cf. 87, 91, and 118), Electra remains primarily concerned with what she can say. Nevertheless, for the first time Electra changes that female passive image of herself by becoming in her language the embodiment of a female avenging spirit. It is she who dares to speak the word "mother" (ματρός, 422), identifying Clytemnestra's implacable temperament with that of a savage-minded wolf.[58] In fact, she appears to think of her mother as a beast. Electra's use of the preposition ἐκ("out of") has overtones suggesting that, as the daughter of such a beast-mother, Electra, too, has inherited the savage temperament of a wolf.[59] The outspokenness of her language at this point in the kommos shows the workings of γένος and ἦθος in the House. It would appear that the chorus have help in making their lesson succeed.

Electra's savage outburst inspires the same hostile and bold language from the chorus as they reply in strophe eta (423-428):[60]

> ἔκοψα κομμὸν Ἄρειον ἔν τε Κισσίας
> νόμοις ἰηλεμιστρίας·
> ἀπριὶκτόπληκτα πολυπάλακτα δ' ἦν ἰδεῖν
> ἐπασσυτεροτριβῆ τὰ χερὸς ὀρέγματα
> ἄνωθεν ἀνέκαθεν, κτύπωι δ' ἐπερρόθει
> κροτητὸν ἀμὸν καὶ πανάθλιον κάρα.
>
> I struck an Areion (Warlike) kommos [striking] in the strains of a Kissian wailing woman, and it was possible to see the successive outstretchings of hands struck incessantly and drawing much blood from above and from below, and my entirely wretched head stricken by a blow sounds in return.

As in the parodos (22-31), the chorus' language call attention to the women themselves not only because, as I have discussed earlier, excessive forms of lamentation were outlawed by Solon, but also because their use of the word kommos to mean "striking" is extremely rare. By describing a kommos as a warlike act of striking, the women underline their particular abuse of ritual lamentation: they are transforming a kommos, a song of lamentation for the dead, into a perverse song, that of female avengers battling for a kind of justice that can only result in more bloodletting, death, and impiety.

In strophe beta (429-433), Electra takes up her part in the Areion song by referring to an "all-daring mother, inflamed and destructive" (δαΐα).[61] The difference, however, between mother and daughter, one admitted by Electra herself, is that Clytemnestra was never satisfied with merely uttering the words of Ares: she dared, she killed, and she buried an arrogant lord entirely on her own. By contrast, Electra dares to kill only in words and only in conjunction with the chorus' instructions.

In strophe iota (434-438), Orestes' response is to disassociate himself from anything that makes him comparable to Electra. He hints in line 434 that "you" (Electra?, the chorus?) "have spoken everything in a way that lacks 'honour'" because it does not require the physical act of taking vengeance on his father's behalf. Orestes' reaction fits the image of males in the House. Not content with words, he insists on a vengeance to be exacted "by my hands" (437), and he places those hands under the guiding and numinous control of the gods. Even though he admits knowing that his action

might precipitate his own death, his reference "by divinites" (ἔκατι δαιμόνων) suggests his hope of divine protection.[62]

In antistrophe iota (439-443), it is the chorus, and not Electra, who mention, for the first time in the trilogy, Clytemnestra's alleged mutilation of her husband's corpse.[63] The women may be attempting to incite Orestes to commit matricide, adding to his reasons anger at such foul treatment by his mother of her father's body. The chorus suggest a parallel between father and son because they allude to the way in which Clytemnestra's treatment of Agamemnon's corpse will cripple Orestes' chance of future authority over the House; her motivation, the women say, derives from her "seeking to make his [Agamemnon's] doom intolerable for your [Orestes'] life".

Electra's reaction to the story suggests that she neither knew of nor was present at any mutilation of the corpse. She merely replies to the chorus: "You are speaking of my father's doom" (444). She never challenges the story nor does she indicate a complete confirmation of its truth. Electra prefers to dwell on the past not as a story about Agamemnon, but rather about herself, about her ruined hopes and humiliating servile status after Agamemnon died. In her recollection, she "was standing aside dishonoured, shut up in an inner-chamber" (444-446). She concentrates entirely upon Clytemnestra's victimization of herself as a helpless and unprotected daughter. If Clytemnestra did mutilate Agamemnon's corpse, whether or not Electra knew or believed it, her actions in the kommos and her

memory of the past suggest how effectively she has been maimed as her father was. Electra sees herself as a woman, like the chorus, forced in the past to pour libations which concealed within them tears of self-pity, as well as sorrow (446-449). Now, in her role outside the house, all she can do is order her father to sympathize with her passive condition: that is how she is kin to the dead kin below.[64]

As the kommos draws to a conclusion, the chorus in antistrophe theta (451-455) urge the children to "be angry to learn the future" and, therefore, "to enter the contest with untiring strength" (453-455). With angry undertones the women stress their personal desire for vengeance and the necessary role of Electra and Orestes as combatants in a war.

When Orestes, Electra, and the chorus join together in a brief stichomythia in strophe kappa (461-465), the women again support the children publicly, echoing Orestes' plea to his father for help, while evoking the audience's sense of their own personal, hostile motives. They describe themselves and the children as forming a στάσις (458), a word which can mean both a "civil war" or "civil war group" and "a party of people who come together for seditious purposes";[65] this is an apt description of the hostile faction comprised of chorus and pupils.

Similarly, Orestes uses a charged word when he appeals to his father to "be an accomplice" and also "to remember [your] kinship to" (ξυγγενοῦ, "to be with us", 456). Ξυγγενοῦ, with its resonances of kinship and thus of the cycle of kin-death, almost appeals to

Agamemnon to come back from the grave either to kill or to be killed again as kin. The chorus play on these ironies when in line 460 they combine the idea of ξυγγενοῦ with an appeal to Agamemnon "to come into the light", that is, to perform as their (the chorus') kin and accomplice in a role that divides, without the understanding of Orestes and Electra, their father into a spirit-avenger assisting two opposing camps. The generalizing phrase "against enemies" (460) and the paradoxical image of Agamemnon as helpmate of the chorus also invite the audience to imagine, if only for a moment, a third Agamemnon rising up to take vengeance on himself as the personification of everything the women detest and seek to destroy in the House.

In their response in antistrophe kappa (461-462), Orestes and Electra ignore the distorted image of an Agamemnon battling an Agamemnon. They speak only of Ares clashing with Ares (Orestes' idea) and of gods bringing justice (Electra's idea), and of Justice falling upon Justice. The paralleling of the terms Ἄρης and Δίκα, and the appeal to gods acting ἐνδίκως ("with justice") shows how successful the chorus have been in making Electra and Orestes believe that Ἄρης and Δίκα are equal in meaning and in moral value. These children not only trust in the cooperation of the deities, they feel no fear in giving them orders or speaking about the actions the deities will undertake in the near future. It is not strange, therefore, that the chorus respond to such hubris in antistrophe kappa (463-465 with an opening sentence that indicates their shock, their trembling at the horrible sounds inspired by their own skillful teaching:

τρόμος μ' ὑφέρπει κλύουσαν εὐγμάτων·
τὸ μόρσιμον μένει πάλαι,
εὐχομένοις δ' ἂν ἔλθοι.

A shudder creeps under me as I hear [these]
prayers. That which is fated [death] waits
for a long time, but it may come to those who pray.

These lins can be understood in at least two ways. On the one hand, Orestes and Electra had been prepared by the kommos to to interpret the chorus' reference to Fate as the fate of punishment due to their mother and her lover, but the dative plural εὐχομένοις ("to those who pray") is ambiguous; the participle can describe either the advantageous or disadvantageous effect of vengeance upon "those who pray". Like earlier references in the kommos, the chorus allude to the doom that awaits the avenging offspring of Agamemnon as well. Even though the women have used the lesson of lex talionis to their own personal advantage in inspiring the children, nevertheless, they reveal, however briefly, an aversion to the creatures who have learned their lesson and who will, each in his or her own way, carry out the chorus' vengeance against Agamemnon's line.

The chorus conclude the kommos with a definition of the House that summarizes the major threads of their song with Orestes and Electra (466-478):

ὦ πόνος ἐγγενής,
καὶ παράμουσος ἄτας
αἱματόεσσα πλαγά,
ἰὼ δύστον' ἄφερτα κήδη,
ἰὼ δυσκατάπαυστον ἄλγος.

δάμασιν ἔμμοτον
τῶνδ' ἄνιος οὐκ ἀπ' ἄλλων
ἔκτοθεν, ἀλλ' ἀπ' αὐτῶν,
δι' ὁμὰν ἔριν αἱματηράν·
θεῶν ‹τῶν› κατὰ γᾶς δδ' ὕμνος.

ἀλλὰ κλύοντες, μάκαρες χθόνιοι,
τῆσδε κατευχῆς πέμπετ' ἀρωγὴν
παισὶν προφρόνως ἐπὶ νίκηι.

O kin toil and bloody stroke of
discordant ἄτα,
o lamentable, intolerable woes,
o pain that is hard to check.

[It is] for the house [to find] a cure
that dresses wounds for these things,
not from others without, but from itself,
because of savage bloody strife.
This song is from the gods below the
earth.

But, listening, o blessed chthonic gods,
willingly send help for this prayer to
the children for the purposes of victory.

Winnington-Ingram is one of the few commentators on this passage who stresses how fully aware the chorus are of the consequences of kin-murder, that is, how single-mindedly they pursue their purpose:[66]

> After a brief lyric invocation (456-65), the Chorus, who have pressed and won their point, but who understand far better than the actors the implications of what is happening, react with horror as they contemplate the intolerable griefs, the cruel bloody strife, of a fatal family. And yet they pray to the μάκαρες χθόνιοι for the victory of the children. (Underscore added)

In praying to chthonic deities to aid the children, the chorus display their ability to set aside any fear for or grief over the idea that the children may suffer: the chorus demand, even more sternly, that vengeance be done. The women have repeatedly emphasized their belief that no cure exists for the kind of disease that afflicts, generation after generation, the γένος of Pelops (66-74); the illness transmits itself through the γένος and

manifests its symptoms in the endless flow of bloody slaughter (400-402). When in line 475 the women speak of "this hymn", it is unclear whether they are offering the hymn to the gods below or, in fact, are defining everything they have described about the demonic characteristics of the House as what comprises a hymn of (i.e. belonging to) the chthonic deities. In this latter sense, the expression "this hymn of blessed chthonic spirits" anticipates the way in which the Ἐρινύες (Eumenides, 331 and 334) describe their own song which derives from the darkness beneath the earth. It is fitting, therefore, that in ending the kommos, the chorus appeal to the "blessed chthonic gods" to come to their aid in bringing about victory for Orestes and Electra. It will be, after all, a "victory" created by the songs of the foreign slave women in the kommos, songs expressive of the powerful hold the chthonic deities have upon the House.

In summary, then, the major theme uniting both the parodos and the kommos is the lesson of "the stern rigour of blood for blood". In the parodos the chorus emphasize the impossibility of any ritual action, whether prayer, the rending of garments, the shedding of tears, or the pouring of libations, to soften or turn aside the anger of gods or of avenging spirits resident in the House of Pelops.[67] In the kommos the chorus use prayer and counsel in a way that reflects partnership with the female abstractions who haunt the line of Agamemnon: Ἐρινύες, Δίκη, and Ἄτη. Moreover, members of this chorus emerge from the house assuming the duties of lamentation, duties that rightfully belong, as Solon's law makes clear, to kinswomen.[68] Such an act begins their association with Clytemnestra. They are

representatives of her ideas and abilities, but they attack despots within the house through the children of despots. In their keen hatred of Agamemnon, the women resemble the "godless woman" herself.

Footnotes

1. The title is borrowed from a description by W. Headlam, Agamemnon of Aeschylus, ed. A.C. Pearson (Cambridge: University Press, 1910), p. 31.

2. Aristotle, On the Art of Poetry, trans. I. Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 1452b24.

3. Liddell & Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. φάρεσιν.

4. Most commentators translate the term προστροπή as "suppliant band": Sidgwick, p. 5; Tucker, p. 13, Garvie, p. 53. Liddell-Scott, s.v. προστροπή, gives the literal meaning as "turning towards" which I have adopted.

5. See repetition of the use of the first person singular pronoun in 18 and 19.

6. Lebeck, Oresteia, p. 99.

7. Ibid, p. 98.

8. Plut. Solon 21.4.

9. Lebeck, Oresteia, p. 86, is the first English scholar to associate the pouring of libations with the flowing of blood.

10. M. Alexiou, The Ritual Lamentation in Greek Tradition (Cambridge: University Press, 1974), pp. 7-8, defines χοάι as "libations of wine, oils and perfumes"; ἐναγίσματα as "milk, honey, water, wine and celery"; πελανός as "a mixture of meal, honey and oil"; and κόλλυβα as "the first fruits of the crops and dried fresh fruits".

11. Cassandra's vision of the floors of the house dripping with the slaughter of babies' blood suggests that she sees more than one generation and one kind of kin-murder in the house. For an account of the complexity of kin relationship in the House of Pelops and the variety of kin-murders carried on therein, see Michael Grant and John Hazel, Gods and Mortals in Classical Mythology (Springfield, Massachussetts: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1973), pp. 84-86. It is surprising that despite the details Grant and Hazel give, they omit the story of Tantalus serving up his son, Pelops, to the gods.

12. For other examples of blood imagery, see Clytemnestra in Ag. 1388-1392:

οὕτω τὸν αὐτοῦ θυμὸν ορμαίνει πεσών,
κἀκφυσιῶν ὀξεῖαν αἵματος σφαγήν
βάλλει μ' ἐρεμνῇ ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου,
χαίρουσαν οὐδὲν ἧσσον ἢ διοσδότῳ
γάνει σπαρητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν.

Thus, having fallen, he breathes out his own spirit, and spurting out a sharp wound of blood, he struck me with the dark drops of bloody dew, as I rejoiced no less than a crop does at the time of the birth pangs of the calex in gladness given by Zeus.

And the chorus to Clytemnestra in Ag. 1505-1512:

ὡς μὲν ἀναίτιος εἶ
τοῦδε φόνου τις ὁ μαρτυρήσων;
πῶ πῶς; πατρόθεν δὲ συλλή-
πτωρ γένοιτ' ἂν ἀλάστωρ·
βιάζεται δ' ὁμοσπόροις
ἐπιρροαῖσιν αἱμάτων
μέλας Ἄρης, ὅποι δίκαν προβαίνων
πάχνᾳ κουροβόρῳ παρέξει.

That you are not responsible for this bloodshed, who will bear witness? How, how [can it be]? But may an avenger arising from his father become an accomplice. And black Ares works violently with streams of kindred blood [to a point] where he is proceeding, he will provide retribution for the clotted [blood] of the devoured children.

13. M. reads κύπτωι which means "bent". This definition does not make sense in the context of the parodos. Κόπωι and κτύπωι have been suggested as possible emendations and they are both suitable in meaning. Although κτύπωι is much closer to M's reading, I follow Page's reading of κόπωι, abiding by the rule of difficilior lectio.

14. Πρόστερνοι occurs only here in Classical Greek literature. Xenophon uses a variation of the term, προτερνίδιον, in military passages, occurrences which suggests that this resonance might have been familiar to Aeschylus' audience as well (Liddell-Scott, s.v.).

15. Orestes also uses the word ὑφασμά to describe the robe which he uses to prove his identity to his sister. The robe was woven by her and was embroidered with animal imagery (231-232).

16. Clytemnestra's use of the historic present tense of the verb allows her to re-enact her husband's murder.

17. There are serious problems in both strophe and antistrophe alpha (22-31 and 32-41), and probably corruption in both. See Garvie, p. 57, for a fuller discussion. I accept Heath's emendation of Φοῖβος to φόβος which makes sense in the context of the passage.

18. For other examples of hatred, see Ag. 137, the chorus say:

στυγεῖ δὲ δεῖπνον αἰετῶν.

She [Artemis] hates the feast of the eagles [the sons of the Atreidae].

And 456, the chorus say:

βαρεῖα δ' ἀστῶν φάτις σὺν κότῳ·

The word of the citizens is heavy with anger [at the sons of the Atreidae].

And 635-636, the chorus ask the herald:

πῶς γὰρ λέγεις χειμῶνα ναυτικῷ στρατῷ
ἐλθεῖν τελευτῆσαι τε δαιμόνων κότῳ;

And what, do you say that a storm came upon the fleet because of the anger of the gods and then stopped/

And 1211, the chorus ask Cassandra:

πῶς δῆτ' ἄνατος ἦσθα Λοξίου κότῳ;

How then were you unscathed by the anger of Loxias?

19. In line 129, when Electra speaks of pouring libations over the grave, she refers to "mortals" i.e. living people, as resident in the grave. The scholiast to this passage, and some commentators following his lead, have replaced the term βροτοῖς ("mortals") with νεκροῖς ("corpses"). In so doing, they miss the possibility of irony in a passage where Electra summons the corpse of her father to take pity on herself and her brother because she must pour out libations on behalf of those who are living and yet who deserve to be dead.

20. Many commentators such as Sidgwick, p. 7, Tucker, p. 21, and Garvie, p. 60, agree with the scholiast. Cf. Ag. 514, where the herald invokes Hermes as "reverence of heralds", showing proper respect to the gods. His description uses the term σέβας in its conventional and positive association with worship of the gods. J.C. Kamerbeek in The Plays of Sophocles, Commentaries trans. Dr. H. Schreuder, 2nd ed., Vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1963), p. 139, on the Ajax, points out that Ajax uses the term cum invidia to refer to the Atreidae (666-667): τοιγάρ τὸ λοιπὸν εἰσόμεσθα μὲν θεοῖς εἴκειν, μαθεσόμεσθα δ' Ἀτρείδας σεβεῖν ("therefore, in the future, we will know that [we must] yield to the gods, but we will learn to reverence the Atreidae"). Cf. Ag. 258, the chorus of Argive elders misapply the term hinting at their fear and contempt for Clytemnestra. Cf. Ag. 787, the chorus use σεβίζω in an inquiry which questions the degree of honour that they should rightfully afford to Agamemnon as king.

21. Commentators have argued over the meaning of lines 59-60. I agree with Tucker, p. 22, that the chorus are here condemning man's excessive worship of prosperity. Verrall, however, regards those lines not as a contrast between man's lack of reverence for the gods and his incorrect worship of prosperity, but rather as a contrast between man's respect for past rulers in Atreus' house and their present worship of prosperity. Tucker, p. 22, insists that the chorus are being sarcastic, but he fails to look beyond that for the causes of the women's tone.

22. See Ag. 922 ff., where the returning Greek warrior-king dares to walk on an oriental display of tapestries, an act which he admits is hubristic.

23. Sidgwick, p. 9; H.J. Rose, A Commentary on the Surviving Plays of Aeschylus, 2 Vols. (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1957), p. 222, and Garvie, p. 65, all agree that the chorus are comparing the loss of virginity to the loss of life.

24. My translation of 79-80 follows Page's Greek text. The debate on these lines concerns the appropriateness of the participle φερομένων whose case and meaning Garvie has difficulty with (pp. 66-67). I prefer to define ἀρχάς as "rulers" and not as a reference to the beginning of the chorus' servitude. The women have just stated that they were taken from their paternal homes and thereafter enslaved (76-81).

25. Garvie, pp. 53-54.

26. Garvie, p. 67, points out that the chorus' action of "weeping under veils" is "not only because this was the traditional attitude of mourning (Hom. Od.4.115 = 154, E. Supp.110, Or. 280, etc.), but more specifically here because the Chorus is afraid to mourn openly". Although Garvie is correct in asserting that the women are hiding their feelings, there is no indication that they are afraid to mourn Agamemnon because of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. They were sent by Clytemnestra to mourn Agamemnon. Moreover, they certainly show no hesitation either in condemning Clytemnestra and Aegisthus or in mourning Agamemnon in the stichomythia with Electra and in the kommos, as well as elsewhere in Choephori.

27. Garvie, p. 67, regards ματαίοισι δεσποτᾶν τύχαις as a reference to the "pointless" and "wicked death of Agamemnon". Paley, as cited by Garvie, regards it as a reference to Orestes; Headlam-Thomson as an allusion to the adultery of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

28. Lebeck, Oresteia, p. 98.

29. Ἄπειρον is a two-termination noun and the accusative singular form can be masculine, feminine, or neuter. It can be translated here as an adjective referring to Electra, as I have done. Ἄπειρον can also mean "boundless" or "limitless" and can be used as an adverb. Liddell-Scott, s.v. In Ag. 1382, Clytemnestra uses the adjective to qualify the binding net or garment with which she encircled Agamemnon and brought him to death. When the words πῶς οὔ are used in a question, they usually indicate that the speaker is expecting an affirmative answer. I have, therefore, translated the question as a positive statement.

30. M's reading has ὄλγος in line 155 which the scholiast emended to ἄγος. I prefer not to translate the death cry because it echoes Cassandra's first shrieks of despair as she calls on Apollo, her destroyer, in Ag. 1072 and again at 1076.

31. Garvie, p. 83, accepts Page's emendation where the latter reverses the order of the words κακῶν τε καὶ κεδνῶν and emends the conjunction τε to δὲ.

32. Alexiou, pp. 21-22, argues that Solon recognized the religious dilemma caused when women use ritual lamentation as a means of stirring up feelings of revenge. He dealt with it by outlawing excessive and violent behaviour of mourners.

33. Liddell-Scott, s.v. ἀναλυτήρ. Ἀναλυτήρ in this form occurs only here in Cho. The abstract noun ἀνάλυσις can mean "dissolving" (Plu.2.915c). Homer uses its un-prefixed form, λύω, to mean the loosening of limbs, i.e. death (Il.4.469, 22.335, 5.176, 16.332, etc.).

34. In Homer's Od.4.824 and 935, the adjective ἀμαυρός is used to describe Athena when she takes on the "faint" image or likeness of Penelope's sister. She is even more rarified than normal in order to appear to the dreaming Penelope.

35. θανόντας is the aorist participle of ἀποθνήσκω, which is used as the passive of ἀποκτείνω, "I kill". This participle denotes, therefore, either those who are dead or those who have died through murder.

36. Aristotle, 1452b24. For a study of Aeschylus' use of the kommos, a dramatic form which appears in many of his tragedies, see M.D. Thomas, "Kommoi and Kommatic Forms, A Study of the Bipartite Lyrics of Aeschylus", M.A. Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1983.

37. Garvie, p. 123.

38. J.J. Peradotto, "The Omen of the Eagles and the Ἦθος of Agamemnon", Phoenix, 23:3 (1969), p. 256, defines ἦθος as follows:

> A man's ἦθος is the abiding disposition or habitual texture of his mind and behaviour. In Greek tragedy it is usually..one or two basic and easily definable attitudes which motivate every significant decision a given character makes.

Ἦθος should be distinguished from γένος, which means the race or clan to which one belongs. These are terms which I use later in the chapter (pp. 45 and 47).

39. Winnington-Ingram, Studies in Aeschylus (Cambridge: University Press, 1983), p. 138.

40. Garvie, pp. 124-125.

41. The chorus of Choephori call upon mother earth (γαῖα μαῖα, 44), an epithet which fits the traditional lineage of the Furies (Hesiod's Theogony, 185). Aeschylus changes their geneology in Eumenides, where Νύξ ("Night") is the mother of the Furies. In the Theogony "Night" is the mother of Κῆρας ("Specters of Vengeance"), who are female vengeful spirits very similar to the Furies in their role. The Furies of Eumenides repeatedly call on mother night, but stress that their place of habitation is below the earth (Eum. 416-417, 1033-1035, 383-343, 871, etc.).
J.J. Peradotto in "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in The Oresteia", AJP 85 (1964), 388-393, observes that Aeschylus combines the lineages of these two groups of goddesses as part of the playwright's continuing contrast between images of light and darkness in Oresteia.
The association between Μοῖρα and Ἐρινύς is also found in Homer's Iliad (19.87-89), where Agamemnon excuses his outrageous stealing of Briseis from Achilles as an act of Ἄτη brought upon him by Zeus, Μοῖρα, and Ἐρινύς.

42. Plato describes his view of lex talionis in Laws (872d-873a) trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 263-265:

> The myth or story (or whatever one should call it), has been clearly stated, as derived from ancient priests, to the effect that Justice, the avenger of kindred blood, acting as an overseer, employs the law just mentioned, and has ordained that the doer of such a deed [i.e., willful murder of a kinsman] must of necessity suffer the same as he has done: if ever a man has slain his own father he must endure to suffer the same violent fate at his own children's hands in days to come; or if he has slain his mother, he must of necessity come to birth sharing in the female nature, and when thus born be removed from life by the hands of his offspring in afterdays; for of the pollution of common blood there is no other purification, nor does the stain of pollution admit of being washed off before the soul which committed the act pays back murder for murder, like for like, and thus by propritiation lays to rest the wrath of all the kindred.

43. Various translations of the phrase πατέρων τε καὶ τεκοντῶν include Tucker's, p. 81, "the father who begat"; H.W. Smith, Aeschylus II (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1930), p. 191, "for fathers and for parents"; Lloyd-Jones, p. 29, "to fathers and begetters". Verrall, translating

the phrase as "for sires slain and for fathers", takes πατέρων to be a reference to father's family or belonging to father, i.e. ancestors, and τεκοντῶν as referring to a particular father, p. 47.

44. Lebeck, Oresteia, p. 129; at p. 126, she discusses other examples of masculine plural and singular nouns used to refer to a single mother.

45. Γόος ("lamentation"), although a masculine noun, is primarily a female activity in Choephori.

46. Garvie, p. 135, treats φίλον as an adjective, but this does not affect my argument. The resonances of kinship are still present.

47. Κελάδος has military connotations, Liddell-Scott, s.v.

48. The word παιάν also recalls the song which Iphigenia sang to her father before he killed her in sacrifice (παιῶνα φίλος ἐτίμα, Ag. 246).

49. Ag. 1080-1082:

> Κα. ἄπολλον, ἄπολλον,
> ἀγυιᾶτ', ἀπόλλων ἐμός·
> ἀπώλεσας γὰρ οὐ μόλις τὸ δεύτερον.
>
> Ca. O Apollo, o Apollo,
> [god of the] road, my destroyer (apollon);
> you have destroyed (apolesas) me with ease
> a second time.

50. Liddell-Scott, s.v. φίλος. And also Ag. 1555-1558; when the chorus of Argive elders ask Clytemnestra who will bury the husband she has murdered, she retors that his daughter, Iphigenia, will "welcome" and "kiss" (φιλήσει) him in the underworld.

51. W. Den Boer in "Private Morality in Greece and Rome", Mnemosyne, Supplementum Quinquagesimum Septimum, (Brill, 1979), p. 252, asserts:

> Women are often called 'childlike and not yet grown up' and were so called in antiquity. Such an attitude has always been fatal to the advancement of women.

Cf. Aeschylus' The Suppliant Maidens, where Danaus, at the outset of giving instructions to his daughters about the need for pious behaviour, calls them παῖδες (176).

Παῖς can refer to a slave child, as well as to a son or daughter.
See also Cho.371, Orestes calls for the "slave" (παῖ) to open the door. For further examples, see Liddell-Scott, s.v.
Garvie, p. 142, who agrees with the scholiast on this passage, asserts: "the chorus is taunting the children - all they can do is talk".

52. Lebeck, Oresteia, p. 118.

53. The passage continues with the following statement: "Why should I hide what nevertheless flutters before my heart?". Although the fluttering of birds' wings can be used metaphorically to refer to the fluttering of one's heart in fear (Ag. 975 ff.), I agree with Garvie (p. 148) that the chorus in this passage do not show any reluctance in their desire for vengeance. Any fear they may feel is indeed 'fleeting', for they regain their confidence in the very next sentence when they speak of "hateful wrath, keep temper blows from the prow of my heart" (391-392).

54. In the phrase Πᾶ χθονίων τε τιμαί (399), Electra uses a term (τιμαί) which the Furies employ in Eumenides to emphasize the threat posed to their own honour if Apollo and Athena succeed in preventing the punishment of Orestes (228, 419, 624, 747, 792, 845, etc.). Τιμαί can also mean "honours" or "prvileges", but it can also refer to "payment" or "penalty" due for a crime committed. For a discussion on the double meanings of the verbs τιμάω and τίω, see Liddell-Scott, s.v.

55. D. Sider, Stagecraft in the Oresteia, AJPh 99 (1978), p. 19, points out that in Ag. "those seeking and obtaining vengeance are compared with the Furies: Agamemnon and Menelaus, 55-63; cf. 644-5; Clytemnestra, 1117-20; Orestes is sent by a Fury, 648 ff. and Orestes accepts the role, 557 ff." Sider also argues (p. 21) that "the visual appearance [of the chorus] is such as to suggest that Orestes and Electra are in fact urged on by the Furies themselves". While I agree with Sider that both choruses act as avengers, the parallel he draws between the visual appearances of the chorus of Cho. and the chorus of Furies in Eum. is difficult to accept unless one can assume that Aeschylus' audience was aware of the Furies' physical appearance before they had either been described or had appeared themselves on stage.

Each of the plays of Oresteia contains elements that shock the audience. For example, Cassandra's trampling of her prophetic and religious robes in Ag. 1265 ff.; the murder of a mother by a son in Cho., and the epiphany of horrifying, repulsive, and vengeful spirits at the end of Cho. It is impossible, however, to know to what extent, at this point in Cho., the audience is able to anticipate the appearance of the Furies in the orchestra. At the end of Cho., when Orestes looks at the chorus and sees the Furies with blood dripping from their eyes (1048-1058), the similarities between the two groups of females becomes clear.

56. Earlier, in 405-407, Orestes indicated his awareness of the disastrous consequences of the cycle of kin-murder when he spoke of very powerful curses of those who died. His words call back the curse that Thyestes had uttered against his brother Atreus after the former had feasted on his children's flesh. That curse, however, is but one moment in the cyclical curse on kin-killers and child-feasters that goes back in the family as far as Tantalus and Pelops. See Pindar's Olympian I, where he re-writes the story of the origin of the curse in order to stress the kind of slander that can accrue to the names of the prosperous when they become too confident of their good fortune.

57. D. Sansone in Aeschylean Metaphors for Intellectual Activity, Hermes Einzelschr. 35 (1975), p. 77, discusses the significance of the image of blackness in 413-414:

> ..black is the color of death and mourning and also of blood. It is therefore likely that the expression either refers to the physiological sensation of the rush of blood throughout the body which accompanies intense emotion or represents metaphorically the incapacitating of a particular organ by applying to it the attributes of death. Death was conceived of as a black cloud or mist which shrouded the individual.

58. Electra has already referred to her mother in a sarcastic and bitterly angry tone at 89-90.

59. Lebeck, Oresteia, p. 122, argues that both children have inherited their mother's wolflike nature.

60. Hermann's emendation of M's Ἄρειον to Ἄριον is unnecessary. The women have previously referred to their lamentation in battle imagery and though rare, Ἄρειον can still fit the metrical system through correption: the diphthong ει may be shortened in front of the short omicron (M.L. West, Greek Metre (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 11.

The epithet "Kissian" refers to a place in Persia and is perhaps an allusion to the Asian background of the chorus. The only other use of kommos to refer to the "striking" or "beating of the head and breast in lamentation" is Bion 1.97 (Liddell-Scott, s.v.).

61. I have given two translations of the word δαΐα in order to show its meanings as "burning" and "cruel", as well as "destructive". Its use here recalls the emphasis in the first play on fire imagery (281 ff.).

62. In 1023-1033, Orestes again asserts that his murderous act was sanctioned by divine Apollo. Moreover, in the trial scene of Eum. (582 ff.), it is the major argument in his defence.

63. Thomson quotes J.G. Frazer who explains the reason for the mutilation (Apollodorus, pp. 328-329):

> Greek murderers used to cut off the extremities such as the ears and noses, of their victims, fasten them on a string, and tie the string around the necks and under the armpits of the murdered men..It appears to be a widespread belief that the ghost of one who has died a violent death is dangerous to the slayer, but he can be rendered powerless for mischief by maiming his body in such a way as would have disabled him in life.

What adds to the horror of the mutilation in Oresteia is that a woman dared to maim her husband's body.

64. The word πάτερ at the end of 450 has been added by Sidgwick.

65. Liddell-Scott, s.v. στάσις, cites Herodotus' use of the word with this meaning at 1.56, 60.

66. Winnington-Ingram, p. 142.

67. Another piece of evidence that the women, in an un-feminine way, are looking upon their personal vengeance as bringing war upon the House. Here, they are using Electra and Orestes for that very purpose.

68. Alexiou, p. 15, points out that, according to Plu. 21.4, Solon's laws not only forbade violent acts of lamentation by women at the tomb, but also restricted such mourning to kinswomen.

CHAPTER THREE

REHEARSAL OF SIDES[1]

This chapter considers an important moment in Choephori, one which allows the audience to understand the full consequence of the chorus' influence upon Orestes and Electra. Lines 479-585 form a separate step in the vengeance soon to take place within the house; specifically, the chorus, having incited Orestes' and Electra's anger against their mother, now assign 'proper' duties to each of the children. Orestes and Electra summon the presence of Agamemnon's spirit, first, by offering him bribes of sacrificial feasts and libations, and, then, by appealing to Earth (Γαῖ') and Persephone (Περσεφόνεσσα) to assist him in seeing how his children fight on his behalf (479-490). In their invocation of their father, Orestes and Electra treat Agamemnon like a forgetful and unheroic figure, a man who needs schooling in the lesson of the past. They remind him of the deceitful and disgraceful circumstances of a murder that caught him like a beast in a net (479-509). Orestes is not afraid to demand that Agamemnon "send up out of the grave Justice as an ally to his dear kindred children" (497).

The chorus, however, appear unwilling to listen to the children as they vaunt before the tomb. The women use the dual number, as well as a double-edged compliment, to warn Orestes and Electra that they have spoken long enough: "you two have stretched out this blameless word" (510). Their reference to ambitious speaking reminds the audience of Agamemnon's reproachful greeting

to Clytemnestra who, he said, "has stretched out [her] speech [befitting a woman] too long" (Agamemnon, 916). Lengthy and hubristic speech seems to be part of the γένος of Agamemnon's line. While Agamemnon attempted to silence his wife, preferring to hear praise only from other males, the chorus of Choephori try to silence Orestes and Electra in order to redirect the children's attention to action: the time for prayer and supplication is over. In switching from the dual to the singular in the words κατώρθωσαι ("you are set right", 512) and ἔρδοις ("you might act", 513), the women also indicate that Orestes is the only one of Agamemnon's children with whom they are concerned. Electra is dismissed from the conversation; her voice is not heard again.

Orestes also ignores his sister when he complies with the chorus' direction; he replies "so be it" (514). His equality with the women at this point is shown by his demand that they explain why Clytemnestra had sent them with offerings to appease Agamemnon's spirit. It is as if Electra had never had a share either by her presence or by her words, in the mixing bowl of lamentation and blood that was poured before the tomb of Agamemnon early in the play.

Orestes' inquiry seems a necessary first step in understanding the behaviour of the woman he is about to kill. The chorus tell Orestes that the "godless woman sent libations because she was shaken by dreams and night-wandering fears" (523-525). She dreamt that she gave birth to a snake whom she put to sleep in the swaddling clothes of a child. She then

offered her breast to her snake-child who, in turn, drew a clot of blood along with her milk (527-533). Through this dream, the chorus imply, the godlessness of the mother, Clytemnestra, has been transmitted through the γένος to the son, Orestes; like his mother, who drew her husband's blood and who did not immediately pour libations of milk and other offerings due him, Orestes will become an equally monstrous snake, who draws his mother's blood from a breast which nourished him with the milk of life. The chorus' account of the dream, therefore, highlights the heinousness of the very crime of matricide they are inciting Orestes to commit.

When the women go on to speak of the "torches" (λαμπτῆρες) which were lit for Clytemnestra because of her fearful dream and of the libations she sent in hope (or expectation) of a "cut cure of woes" (535-559), they are again being ironic.[2] The torches remind us of the beacon lights which, in Agamemnon, 281 ff., signalled to Clytemnestra the defeat of Troy and, consequently, Agamemnon's impending death at her hands. In addition, the chorus' description of funeral libations as a "cut cure for woes" is suitably ambiguous diction for women who have turned the pious ritual of lamentation and prayer into a means of rousing hatred. In describing the cure as "cut" (τομαῖον), the chorus emphasize the futility of Clytemnestra's hope and expectation. They are, after all, the same women who first declared that there was no cure for the bloodshed of the diseased house (66-74) and then stressed that the only cure for that house came from within (471-475).

The "cut cure" that Clytemnestra hopes for aptly describes, in the chorus' mouth, the cure that cuts "timely" or "fatal" (καιρίαν) wounds from which blood flows perpetually in the accursed House.

Strangely, the very Orestes who has never explicitly spoken the word "mother", is now capable of interpreting the dream in terms of his own specific and personal relationship with his mother. This 'new' Orestes needs no chorus to teach him; he is the dream diviner: "I judge that it [the dream] fits together in such a way" (542). Furthermore, he is prepared, by his own admission, to become the monstrous son of a monstrous mother (550-551). But the chorus do not grant Orestes complete autonomy at this point. They draw him back into the sphere of their female influence, asserting that he will not really be a dream-diviner until they choose to accept him as such (551). Indeed, the women instruct him to assign parts in the revenge to himself and his sister (552-553).[3]

Orestes yields to the chorus' emphatic reminders of proper place and goes on to treat his sister in the same way that the slaves have done in the kommos. In 554-555, Electra is told to go inside and to conceal Orestes' (ἐμάς, "my") plans. In this way Electra is not only silenced, but also placed out of sight, back inside a territory that is hateful to her; paradoxically, she is isolated from the brother who is her father, her mother, and her dead sister (239-242). Electra has now ceased to exist. What does exist in Orestes' mind is his own self-image as a Fury

who is never "stinting in bloodshed" and who "drinks unmixed blood, a third potion" (577-578).

Orestes' description of the Fury appears to give him the confidence to acknowledge the chorus' right to have a role in his act of vengeance. He treats the femininity of the chorus and Electra differently; the latter, almost with mockery, is told to do the impossible -- to guard affairs in the house well (579-580). The chorus, on the other hand, while urged to maintain an auspicious tongue, are assigned the role of speaking "what is timely" (581-582). In this way Orestes, perhaps without realizing the full implications of what he is saying, accepts the chorus as 'kin' with greater authority than Electra. The women of Choephori have symbolically replaced Electra as the 'sister' of Orestes. They have only one more step to take in accepting this role fully and that is by becoming the "timely" spokesman and 'partners in crime' of their 'brother'.

Footnotes

1. The title is a paraphrase of Lattimore's translation of lines 551-553:

> I choose you my interpreter to read these dreams. So may it happen. Now you must rehearse your side in their parts. For some, this means the parts they must not play.

2. The word ἐλπίς has both meanings, Liddell-Scott, s.v.

3. The chorus' use of the word λέγω, placed at the end of the line, is emphatic. Also, λέγω is a pun on λέγω, meaning "I choose", a definition which also stresses the chorus' sense of authority.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTNERS IN CRIME

I have separated discussion of Choephori into two major units which follow the natural division of the play itself. Choephori presents the chorus in two subtly different capacities. From lines 10 to 584 (Chapters Two and Three) everything that the chorus say and do is witnessed not only by the audience, but, more importantly, by Orestes, Electra, and the silent Pylades. In other words, although in Chapters Two and Three I have indicated how clearly the chorus use ambiguous language to further their own ends, the women's speeches in the first half of the play are public, a fact that leads them to be more cautious in their condemnation of the House. By contrast, from lines 585 until the end of the play (1076), there are only two occasions when the chorus engage in discussion with various members of the household: Cilissa, Aegisthus, and Orestes. The role of the chorus in the second half of the play is more private; the women are alone in the orchestra as they speak to the audience. In their solitude their songs are meditations on the justice of death; the songs resound with appeals to Earth, Zeus, and Hermes. Strangely enough, during this more personal and private presentation by the chorus of their views, the women also take a more active hand in ensuring the success of Orestes' plot to kill kin. It is as if in the second half of the play, dialogue, in the mind of the chorus, must be utilized as a tool either to prevent those within the house from taking safeguards against

murder or to reinforce Orestes' flagging self-confidence with words that ironically remind him of the Fury of Fate that pursues him.

In order to understand how the chorus, in the second half of the play, reveal more subtly their avenging nature, and also their twisting of Orestes into a "female" agent of death, I examine in this chapter the following dramatic moments: the song of "godless women" in the First Stasimon (585-602); the Cilissa-Second Stasimon and Aegisthus complex (734-782, 783-835, and 838-874), which contains evidence of the chorus' role as accomplice, and, finally, the Third Stasimon (935-971) and Exodos (972-1076), which show how quickly songs of triumph turn into cries of defeat.

(i)

Anne Lebeck has considered the First Stasimon as both a means of understanding Clytemnestra and murder throughout the trilogy:[1]

> Within the structure of the Oresteia the first stasimon of the Choephori is emphatic by position: it falls at the center of the central drama..Indirectly it directs attention to the central problems of the trilogy.

While I am greatly indebted to Lebeck's suggestion that each mythological story should be seen as a mirror reflection of problems with men, as well as with women, my emphasis will be on the contribution of the stasimon to understanding the connection the chorus establish between male images contained in each myth and Orestes as a bringer of evil upon the female.[2]

Strophe alpha (585-592) is perhaps the most vital part of the ode because of its emphasis on beasts. The chorus speak of many monsters nourished by the earth, the very parent whom the women had invoked in the parodos as their "mother" (γαῖα μαῖα, 44). These earth-born beasts are also described in an abstract manner as the "terrible" and "dangerous (δεινά) "woes of fear" (586). In addition, the women connect these beasts, whether sea-serpents or other dangerous land monsters, to wrath: mother earth not only breeds things that fly and walk, but these creatures are also terrifyingly human in the passion of anger they possess. By the end of strophe alpha, therefore, although there is no explicit reference, the language of the chorus resonates with echoes of the images associated with the women from their entry in the parodos.

Although the women evoke the images as introduction to an ode that recounts the mythological exploits of other evil women, the language of beasts, as well as of fear, sorrows, and wrath, along with stories about deadly women, form the background against which the audience can see reflections of Clytemnestra on the surface and also sense images of another set of deadly women, the chorus, beneath the surface.

In antistrophe alpha (594-602), the chorus speak, first, in general of "over-daring temperament of man" (husband?, mankind?); second, specifically of "daring women who are all-daring in passion"; third, of "associates in ruin"; fourth and finally, of a "female-empowered passionless passion that both conquers and excels yoked-together unions of beasts and of mortals".

The emphasis in this stanze is primarily upon the female as the greater transgressor in terms of evil; she is the one connected with sexual lust and with a "power" (κράτος) that normally belongs to men. It would be easy to dwell on the repetition of the word "lust" (ἔρωτας and ἔρως) in lines 597 and 600, to think, that is, only of Clytemnestra as the chief target of the description of the chorus. To do so, however, is to pass over the word "passionless" (ἀπέρωτος, 600), an epithet that hardly characterizes Clytemnestra's delight in her sexual relations with Aegisthus, her nearly-sexual joy at boasting over a dead Agamemnon at her feet (Agamemnon, 1390 ff.), and the "relish that a dead Cassandra adds to her couching" (Agamemnon, 1445-1447). The stories of the chorus do not emphasize sexuality as the cause of woman's downfall. Rather, the stories indicate how woman in the trilogy (and in ancient Athenian society) is valued only for a sexuality that ensures procreation and the continuation of households governed by men, and how easily the female can be condemned on that very basis, too.

In strophe beta (603-611), the chorus focus on Althaea, who, in some ancient accounts, cursed her son for the murder of her brothers. Whether she actually kills her son or not, the emphasis in traditional accounts is on the absolute power the mother holds over the continuation of her son's life,[3] a lifespan embodied by a log that many storytellers describe her burning out of hatred. Lebeck is the first scholar to see that this story,

and that of Scylla in antistrophe beta, represent mirror images of the murder of kin in Oresteia.[4] The myth of Althaea allows the chorus of Choephori to anticipate a son killing a mother, that deed being seen as an act of kin-killing, and, finally, the deed as constituting a fully premeditated act. The Greek word προνοιαν (606) stresses Althaea's deliberate planning to take her son's life and, as such, it exemplifies Orestes' crime of "passionless passion" in his cold indifference to the laws of Zeus Ξένιος (god of hospitality) and to the duties of hospitality. But if Orestes' plan is without passion, so, too, is the chorus', the prime mover of hate, bloodletting, and Justice in Choephori.[5]

The heinousness of women's plots to kill becomes even clearer in antistrophe beta (613-621), where the chorus focus on Scylla. This female kills kin, not like Althaea, because of harm done to fellow kin, but for reasons outside the family, namely, bribery.[6] The chorus describe her as ὰ κυνόφρων (621), "the woman who thinks like a bitch",[7] a predator who cuts her father's symbol of power, a lock of hair, while he is asleep, and, therefore, unaware and impotent.

The inverse, of course, of daughter killing father is Agamemnon's slaughter of his daughter, Iphigenia. Like Scylla, his reasons for murder lay outside the family, specifically, his desire as commander not to betray a naval expedition to Troy, not to fail an alliance of men and turn them into his personal enemies (Agamemnon, 206-217). Scylla, the chorus say, kills her father

in order to 'aid and abet' his enemies (615 ff.). Just as Scylla is bought by the price of golden necklaces (615-617), Agamemnon is bought by his fear of losing the spoils of war. The theme of greed unites male and female. Ironically, in their story of Scylla, the sleeping Nisus resembles the awake, but innocent, victim, Iphigenia, in the story of Agamemnon's actions at Aulis. The male Nisus is the chorus' surrogate for the female victim of Agamemnon's greed and political self-interest. Once again, the theme of victimization unites male and female. One of the purposes of the story is to remind the audience of the intensity of the chorus' contempt for Agamemnon and the religious, economic, and political values which he represents.[8]

In the corrupt strophe gamma (623-630), the women indicate that their stories may not be exactly what they seem on the surface. The chorus use the past tense to speak about "toils that cannot be soothed away", about a "union that is hard to love" (or "hard on kin") and which is "prayed against in the house", and especially about "women who plot as counsellors of wit against an armour-bearing man" (623-627). Although, superficially, the stories appear to summarize the actions of other women, namely, Althaea and Scylla, the adverb ὡραίως ("untimely" or "unsuitably", 624) suggests that the stories are also self-reflexive.[9] The chorus hint that their stories about hateful women are inappropriately told because they reflect, like a mirror, stories about the hateful kin of the House of Pelops. But the most important story told through

the imagery of strophe gamma is that of women as plotters and counsellors seeking methods to destroy men, whether through action (i.e. Althaea and Scylla) or through storytelling (i.e. the chorus).[10]

The last story told by the chorus focuses on the Lemnian affair. The use of the neuter (τὸ Λήμνιον, "the Lemnian thing", 631), to create a generalized account, and the resonance of the verb πρεσβεύεται make this the crowning or climactic story of the ode. The traditional account considers the crime of the Lemnian women who killed their husbands in anger at being sexually rejected by the men.[11] The chorus avoid any direct condemnation of the Lemnian women and concentrate, rather, on another neuter abstraction, "the terrible thing" (τὸ δεινὸν) that is "comparable to Lemnian woes" (634). Herodotus' account of "the Lemnian deeds" (τὰ ἔργα Λήμνια, 6.138-139) may throw some light on this passage.[12] He extends the myth to a later generation during which Pelasgian men bring concubines from Attica to Lemnos, sire a generation of bastard sons, and end by killing those concubines and bastard offspring in fear of depriving their legitimate sons of power and the authority to rule. When the chorus ask rhetorically whether they have not "gathered together" their account of Lemnos "with justice" (637), they may be referring to a view of the incident similar to Herodotus'. If so, their account brings to culmination the mythological stories told in the First Stasimon about male and female kin destroying kin, about polluting acts that lead to the hatred of gods (635), and about the total

destruction of a race of mortals that departs "disfranchised" (ἀτιμωθὲν, 635).[13] The last sentence in this account of the Lemnian affair is: "no one gives religious honour to a race that is unloved by the gods" (637), unloved because it is hostile to kin.

The common thread in each of the three stories is the deed of kin-murder, whether the killer is female acting alone, like Althaea and Scylla, or members of a race acting in concert, like the Lemnians. The bloody price all these killers exact is taken without thought for who suffers the consequences of the deed, whether son, father, concubine, husband, or bastard son. These stories of kin-murder function like a sword that, for the chorus, "pierces near to the lungs" (639). Furthermore, they are stories that are truly ὀναίρως told in their appeal to Justice because they do not fulfill Orestes' admonition in line 582 that the women speak in a way that is "seemly" for slaves, and "timely" (καιρία). The stories of kin-killing in the First Stasimon heighten, paradoxically, the baseness of kin-murder, the very crime Orestes is about to undertake on behalf of the women.

In antistrophe delta (646-650), the chorus conclude the ode by associating Δίκη, a female noun, with two other females, Αἶσα and Ἐρινύς.[14] According to the women, a "famous deep-thinking Ἐρινύς will bring on the son [τέκνον] to the house in future to requite the pollution of long-past blood" (649-651). As noted in Chapter Two, the image of the women, who speak of themselves primarily in the first person singular, as a singular collective

Fury, appears to be present here as well.[15] In fact, in the closing lines of the antistrophe, the women are telling another story, this time about an imminent act of kin-killing, one that will bring the son, Orestes, like a deep-thinking Fury, against old crimes of bloodshed in the House. Through this act, Orestes extends and demonstrates the Fury-like hatred of the chorus.

The stories of the First Stasimon are different from any of the prayers or advice given by the women in the first half of the play. Those were words aimed directly at Orestes and Electra to tell them how to think and what to do. By contrast, the First Stasimon contains stories about "godless women" and acts of kin-murder that help the audience to look at Clytemnestra almost sympathetically.[16] If she is a "godless woman", there is a "godless man" who, in word and in deed, has transformed her into the beast-like and fearful killer she became. Similarly, the First Stasimon, particularly the Lemnian myth, suggests that, if the chorus of Choephori are "godless women", they have been driven to their subversive attacks on the House by male members of Agamemnon's line who treat women as slaves, mere objects easily deprived of home, kin, respectability, and an honoured place in society.

(ii)

Immediately after the First Stasimon, as Orestes approaches the house, he acts in a way that reminds us of the outlook and

behaviour of both the chorus of Choephori and Clytemnestra.[17] Orestes does not openly attack members in the house like his warrior father had in waging war upon the household of Priam in Troy. Instead, he first gains access to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus through guile, an act which the chorus later identiy with female "Deceitful Persuasion" (726).[18] Orestes' use of deceit, of lies or half-truths, makes him the complement of Clytemnestra in the first play and of the chorus of Choephori, both of whom work through female deception. Orestes is an extension of this female personality. Just as the female chorus have perverted ritual acts of lamentation by using them as a means of rousing hatred, Orestes, too, is perverting the sacred rites of ξένια ("hospitality"). The guile he uses in telling stories that disarm Clytemnestra anticipates the same guile the chorus employ in speaking to Cilissa and Aegisthus.

During the scene in which Orestes tells lies to his mother about a "dead Orestes" (674-690), almost as if to test her love for her son and her willingness to lament such sorrowful news, the chorus stand by as silent onlookers.[19] Their silence frames a scene in which the full impact of their lessons in the kommos are brought home to Orestes. If he had ever entertained thoughts that Clytemnestra was not a snake-mother, a creature worthy of death, her response or, rather the lack of her display of maternal feeling, bears out everything the chorus taught Orestes earlier about the love of kin as expressed by members of the House of Pelops.

In a soliloquy (719-729), just before the arrival of Cilissa, the chorus describe themselves to us as "female slaves, the kin-beloved of the house" (φίλιαι δμωίδες οἴκων, 719). The women extend the irony of their quasi-kindred affiliation to the House by connecting themselves to the cause of Orestes, specifically, through the "strength of [their] mouths" (721-722); in other words, they are anticipating how they will use talk to deceive Cilissa, and, therefore, to help Orestes kill kin. Furthermore, when the chorus say "It is ripe time for Deceitful Persuasion to go down into [the contests] with" (ὠμάζει Πειθὼ δολίαν ξυναταβῆναι, 726-727), they are referring not only to the deceitful lies that successfully got Orestes into the house, but also to the ways in which they will 'aid and abet' his cause. The verb ξυναταβῆναι, which means "to go down into [the contests] with", emphasizes, through the prefix ξυν, the association of the women with Orestes and their intention to serve as his accomplices. For the audience, the juxtaposition at the ends of lines 726-729 between the female goddess, "Deceitful Persuasion" (Πειθὼ δολίαν), and the male god, chthonic Hermes, poses the chorus as the leaders and the personification of "Deceitful Persuasion", and Orestes as the doer or the bringer of the deadly message of Hermes.

As the image of Deadly Persuasion, then, the women bear no resemblance to, nor do they show any concern for, their fellow female slave, Cilissa, who now enters the stage. Her grief, they say, is not "paid for" (ἄμισθός, 733). Their songs of lamentation, however, which were sung at Clytemnestra's behest are, as Alexiou

notes, the songs of women "hired" (μίσθος) to mourn.[20] Just as Clytemnestra manifested no sincere sorrow in hearing about the death of a son, the chorus of Choephori show no sorrow, that is, no feeling of kinship, towards one of their own kind. The slave Cilissa teaches the audience the real meaning of the word φίλια in the trilogy and, in fact, exemplifies all of its positive aspects. Like the chorus, Cilissa's position within the household is without power; she leads a life devoted to toil for masters. Nevertheless, she finds no difficulty in calling Orestes φίλον in line 749.

In the kommos, the chorus had inspired Orestes to intensify his hatred for his φίλοι in the house. Cilissa exhibits different feelings towards Orestes; she recalls all of the humble, personal, and treasured moments of her association with him as a child who, in every way except through blood, was her φίλος. On the one hand, she unintentionally gives credence to the chorus' shaping of Orestes' hatred for his mother when she, in a bold statement for a slave, condemns Clytemnestra for her unfeeling, un-kindred reaction to news of a son's death ("she put a scowl on her face while concealing laughter within her eyes", reading M's θέτο σιυθρωπὸν ἔνθος ὀμμάτων, γέλων in line 737).[21] On the other hand, Cilissa's candour about the queen's attitude does not automatically make her disloyal to the House, or willing to serve its masters in any way she can. Cilissa determines to carry out Clytemnestra's command, namely, that she both convey the news of Orestes' death

to Aegisthus (764-765) and that she warn Aegisthus to come back armed and with bodyguards (766-769). She may hate the "destructive" Aegisthus (764), but in her willingness to comply with the commands of her mistress, she demonstrates her unquestioning φίλια. For Cilissa, it appears that the House, both physically and metaphorically, is all she has left of Orestes; it reminds her of a time when relations among its kin-members were better.

The chorus' way of showing φίλια is to act as accomplices of Cilissa's "dead" Orestes. The women assume the rights of Clytemnestra by ordering their fellow slave to alter her mistress' message, that is, to tell Aegisthus to come back alone (770-771). They work on Cilissa' hatred of the man who has, in her own words, destroyed the house (764). In so doing, they are using hatred in the same way as they had with the children in the stichomythia (106-123) and in the kommos. Earlier in the kommos, the chorus openly sympathized with the plight of Orestes and Electra as φίλοι in the house; now, in this scene, they show no sympathy for a fellow slave; they never once indicate that they understand how deep a loss Cilissa has suffered in the "death" of Orestes. This is a crucial point. The chorus could have revealed the truth about Orestes as being alive, both to alleviate the emotional burden borne by his pseudo-mother and to draw her as a willing accomplice into the faction led by Orestes. But all the women do is hint of some secret knowledge they have, some possibly better news that is never made quite explicit (773-782).[22] By giving orders to Cilissa

and by never divulging the reason why she should tell Aegisthus to come alone, they treat Cilissa as an inferior, almost as if she were their slave.

The chorus show the difference between their servile status and that of Cilissa by the guardedness of their language. Cilissa openly expressed either love or hate for members of the household. In contrast, the chorus appear unable to voice any of their true feelings, except through the use of ambiguous language. Even after Cilissa departs to carry out their commission, the women continue singing an ode full of double meanings.

The Second Stasimon (783-837) is important for two reasons: first, it re-emphasizes the chorus' vision of Orestes as the snake-"thing born" (τέκνον), the child who kills his monstrous mother and, second, it makes the role of the chorus in the coming act of vengeance a more personal one, because the women invoke a series of divine figures, appealing to these deities to oversee the deadly work of Orestes that is going on in the house.

Here, as in the First Stasimon, the chorus are along in the orchestra and their words are directed at the audience. Unlike the "godless" Clytemnestra, the women never openly admit that they are playing a duplicitous game; rather, in the stasima they continue to use language befitting slaves in order to create images that will remind the audience of the justice and the propriety of their words, in general, and their influence upon Orestes, in particular. The chorus appear to believe that, as slaves, they must act through

others. Although Clytemnestra's feminine wiles entrapped Agamemnon, she also actually killed him. The women are like Clytemnestra in their use of feminine wiles, but they never actually participate in the deed of murder.

In strophe alpha (783-789), the chorus beseech Zeus with the words: νῦν παραιτουμέναι μοι, πάτερ Ζεῦ θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων (literally, "now, to me beseeching, father Zeus of the Olympian gods"), "grant that the fortunes of the house come to pass" (τύχας τυχεῖν, 786).[23] The position of the word πάτερ ("father") immediately between the personal pronoun μοι and the vocative Ζεῦ allows the audience to hear, albeit for a brief moment, the chorus invoking Zeus as their father. Moreover, by using the neutral phrase τύχας τυχεῖν, the chorus force the audience to determine for themselves whose fortunes the women are referring to, and whether those fortunes are good or bad. Justice, a female deity who exacts the punishment of death demanded by the Ἐρινύες again provides the women with justification of their words (788).

In the intervening mesode alpha (789-793), the chorus continue to importune Zeus to "place him [Orestes] within the palace before his enemies, Zeus, since, if you lift him up to be great, you will receive in exchange twice and three times recompense. It is ironic that the chorus both in strophe alpha and in this stanza should invoke Zeus presumably to aid Orestes and his family; Zeus, as the audience would be aware, is, among other things, Zeus ξένιος, the very god of hospitality whose rights Orestes has abused

in gaining access to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The religious conflict creates an ominous tone that allows the audience to think that the phrase "twice recompense" refers to the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and the "thrice recompense" to the deaths of the same two people, with Orestes' making up the third.

In antistrophe alpha (794-800), the women's image of Orestes as a πῶλον ("young colt") "bereft of a dear kinsman" hints of his "female nature". The word πῶλον, as Gould notes, usually refers to a young, unbroken female horse.[24] Moreover, the image of the colt "yoked to a chariot of woes" is part of a "traditional network of imagery and metaphors which associates females and their role in sex and marriage with animals".[25] In addition, the chorus' image of Zeus placing a μέτρον ("measure", "limit", or "moderation") on the running of Orestes, contains within this double entendre the grotesque image of an Orestes who must somehow "moderate" his murder of mother and cousin.[26]

In strophe beta (801-807), when the chorus call on "those [gods?] within the house" to "atone [release] blood for recently-spoken Δίκαις", they create an image that both Wilamovitz and Winnington-Ingram have connected with the Furies:[27]

> This divine collective embodies the total experience of a house which we know to have embraced recurrent bloodshed. It is this which makes it appropriate - and vain - for the Chorus to pray for an absolution of blood by new acts of justice (i.e. new acts of revenge), and that the aged φόνος may no longer breed in the house. Moreover, it invites the audience to remember that among the spirits which haunt the house are a δαίμων of heavy wrath and the Erinyes of the children of Thyestes.

If Winnington-Ingram is correct in arguing that the chorus here invoke, among other, the Furies, then the women's words are doubly ironic when they continue their prayer with a wish that "aged bloodshed no longer breed in the house" (806). The women are praying to the very goddesses whose function it is to ensure that φόνος does breed in the house. The only way to end the breeding of slaughter in this house is the destruction of every member of its line, particularly Orestes, who will be the only surviving male after Aegisthus dies. The audience must infer that Electra is figuratively 'dead' since she has been silenced and deprived of any part in the vengeance Orestes exacts upon his kinfolk. In fact, if Orestes is destroyed, Electra would have no male protector nor, presumably, any viable status in Argos.

In mesode beta (807-812), the chorus pray that an unnamed god who dwells in a well-built cavern "grant that the house of man look up well and see the bright light of freedom with beloved kin eyes from hidden darknesses". Most commentators regard this stanza as an invocation to Delphic Apollo.[28] Verrall, however, thinks the women are referring to an unnamed divine "power who holds the passage between the living and the dead".[29] In either case, the dramatic irony visible in the previous stanzas is also present here, particularly in the juxtaposition of its image of contrasting light and darkness with that contained in antistrophe beta, a point which Garvie notes:[30]

> [In antistrophe beta (813-818], the Chorus prays to Hermes as the god who brings success and speeds one on one's way..and who works in darkness..The juxtaposition of this stanza with mesode beta (with προύμμάτων picking up ὄμμασιν there) is ominous. Orestes' deed, which is to bring light out of darkness, is itself to be an act of darkness.

The ominous tone that Garvie notes is also present in the chorus' image of Hermes accomplishing a "fair-wind deed" (814); as the chthonic god of death, Hermes will bring to pass an ill wind, one which brings the darkness of death, not the light of freedom. If one retains M's reading of lines 815-816, the sentence is πολλὰ δ' ἄλλα φανεῖ χρήιζων ασκοπον δ' ἔπος λέγων ("If he is willing, he will reveal many other things, while speaking an obscure word"), a reading that has troubled many scholars.[31] Whether one accepts M's reading of λέγων in line 816 or Muller's emendation of that word to λέγω, which Sidgwick accepts, the use of deliberately obscure language befits a chorus of slaves unable to give full and public expression to their feelings and thoughts. Like the god Hermes, whom they invoke here as god of guile, the chorus utter a word that is either "dim" in its meaning or, conversely, "cannot be guarded against" (ἄσκοπον ἔπος).[32]

Strophe gamma (819-825) interrupts the chorus' pattern of invoking gods and reitering the themes of justice and death in order for the women to dwell briefly on themselves as singers of such songs. The women define their songs as "a famous [musical] strain [or "law"] for deliverance, a female [strain]

with winds set fair" (819-821). The chorus associate their own female wind-song with the male wind-deed of Hermes and, thus, emphasize the implied connection between song, deed, and death.[33] The "loud and shrilly-struck strains" sung by the women are like other deadly female songs in Oresteia: Clytemnestra's song of triumph over her husband's corpse, the song of vengeance chanted by the Furies in Eumenides, and the slave women's own song of vengeance in Choephori.

As the women conclude strophe gamma, stressing their singular personal gain (κέρδος), they ironically speak of Ἄτη standing away from their beloved kin (825-826). The audience has already seen the manner in which the chorus speak of and treat members of Pelops' line, to whom they are "kin" and "beloved", and female slaves like Cilissa. When seen in the light of the one personal reference the chorus make to their background in the parodos (75-81), the women's description of personal gain hints that they are speaking of an Ἄτη which stands away, not form their "kin" in the House of Pelops, but rather from their own flesh and blood kin, because the latter were killed not by their own kin, but by Agamemnon or his male predecessors.

As the chorus end the Second Stasimon, they foretell the actual moment of Orestes killing his mother with a description that, when the audience 'sees' the murder taking place, will demonstrate how kindred a spirit Orestes is to the chorus. They tell an absent Orestes to shout "father" (πάτερ) to Clytemnestra's cry of "son"

(τέκνον, 829-830).[34] Although absent, Orestes carries out these instructions during the murder scene (909-927); he is so closely allied to the chorus' view of the House that he not only acts as the women would, if they could, but he also speaks with the words that the women would use, if they could -- and he does so without being directly told.

The women describe the vileness of the deed of matricide in a way that is reminiscent of their earlier description of Clytemnestra's dream of a snake-son and its implications for Orestes as that monstrous "thing born" (τέκνον). During their account of that dream, Orestes had quickly recognized that he himself was the monstrous thing born that would kill the other monster who gave him birth. Now, in line 830, the Ἄτη that the women tell him to bring to fulfillment is, then, truly "blameable" (ἐπίμομφον).[35]

In antistrophe gamma (831-837), the chorus set up an obvious comparison between Perseus and Orestes. One of Perseus' most famous deeds, certainly the one that establishes his heroism, is the slaughter of Medusa, a gorgon.[36] The ancients conceptualized Medusa as a terrifying female creature with snakes writhing in place of hair, a goddess whose stare would turn any man to stone.

The connections between Medusa and Clytemnestra are clear; Clytemnestra is a snake-mother whose snake-son draws power from sucking her milk and blood. Like Perseus, Orestes will establish his right to rule in the house only through a "rite" of passage

which involves killing his snake-mother. The word for "gorgon" in line 835 is an emendation proposed by Kirchhoff who sensed that it has fallen out and been replaced by the easier reading (lectio facilior) of ὀργᾶς which means "anger" or "wrath". Whether or not one accepts the emendation, the pun is there in ὀργᾶς because of the placement of that word within the story of Perseus. Without the emendation, line 835 reads as follows: "Assume instead of χάριτος ["favour"] baneful wrath" (προπρόσσων χάριτος ὀργᾶς λυπρᾶς).[37]

A widely debated phrase in the stanza is "the man who is blameworthy" (τὸν αἴτιον, 836). Insofar as these lines directly precede the arrival of Aegisthus, they prepare the audience to look at Aegisthus as culpable, and, therefore, deserving to be set up for death in the way the chorus do in lines 838 ff. Nevertheless, in the context of Agamemnon and Choephori, Clytemnestra is also a "male" and culpable because she has stripped the house of its rightful masculine authority: she abrogated κράτος ("masculine authority") for herself. In so doing, she has become a male worthy to be killed, deserving of the wrath of a Perseus-like son.

The brief scene with Aegisthus that follows the Second Stasimon, while interrupting the audience's expectation of Clytemnestra's imminent death, balances the scene with Cilissa which precedes the Second Stasimon. The framing effect created by the Cilissa and Aegisthus scenes permits the audience to see how active a part the chorus take in preparing for the shocking murder

of a mother by a son. In this scene the women help Orestes, without his knowledge, to succeed as a Perseus killing a Medusa-mother.

When Aegisthus comes on stage, confident of his ability to bring the house into order, he asserts that he has come to clear up any problems arising from the news of Orestes' death. In lines 845-846 he describes stories that have caused women to fear; these "frightening stories from women", Aegisthus says, "leap into the air and die in vain". Nevertheless, he turns to the chorus, appearing to trust these women and their stories to guide his action (847). The women, almost as a comment on the distrust he shows in line 844 about the reliability of the news of Orestes' death, urge him to seek answers inside -- from "guest-friends" (ξένων, 848). They use his distrust of stories told by females to mock his masculinity and, thereby, to convince him to enter the house on his own (849-850). They send Aegisthus to his death.

After Aegisthus leaves the stage, the chorus pray briefly to Zeus (855-868). They ask "how [they] will complete speaking what is fair" (or "equal", i.e. "the right measure", ἴσον, 855). They go on to say that "edges of man-killing knives are about to be stained [so that] they will either cause the entire destruction of Agamemnon's house or [Orestes?], by kindling fire and light for freedom, [he?, they?] will have power that rules cities and great wealth of his fathers". The chorus, by posing an alternative between the total destruction of Agamemnon's house and the kindling of fire and light for freedom, appear to truly support Orestes, particularly

since their words are spoken while alone in the orchestra. But the audience would be well aware by this time that, as Winnington-Ingram notes, "the extinction of the house will be threatened as much by the success as by the failure of Orestes, its survival only secured by the outcome of the trial at Athens (Eum., 754 ff.)". [38] Moreover, in the context of Oresteia, the kindling of fire and light is as much a sign of death and destruction as it might be of resolution in Eumenides.[39]

It is not unexpected then, that this chorus of women, who continually use irony embeeded in obscure language to voice their feelings, decide to "stand aside" while the actual murders are taking place, "so that [they] not seem to be responsible for these evils" (872-873). Nevertheless, their tricking of Cilissa and Aegisthus in a way that leads to the murder of an unarmed Aegisthus and later, Clytemnestra, belies the truth of their words in lines 871-873. In wishing to "seem" blameless of these evils, the chorus draw attention, paradoxically, to their own culpability. Orestes is their Ares, their Hermes, their Justice, their Perseus in fighting a "battle" (μάχης) against the House; he is at the point of "becoming master of his objective" (κεκύρωται τέλος, 874). The women are content to let their warrior appear the absolute victor.

(iii)

The Third Stasimon (931-972) of Choephori is perhaps the most dramatic one, because the lyric song and dance of the chorus

in the orchestra is superimposed upon the murder of Clytemnestra which is taking place, at the same time, inside the house. The audience was able to hear the death cries of Agamemnon and Aegisthus, but Clytemnestra's cries, if she makes any, are drowned out by the chorus' song about the triumph of Justice. In the first four lines directly preceding the Third Stasimon, the women appear to lament the death of the victims, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.[40] However, "the twofold fortune of these" (931) could also refer, as Rose notes, to the double mishap to be suffered by Clytemnestra and Orestes: "she must die and he is to be a matricide".[41]

As I have noted earlier, every renewal of vengeance in the House of Pelops inevitably leads to the destruction of those who dare to carry it out. Clytemnestra and Orestes, both of whom performed the physical act of murder, must be destroyed, under the dictates of lex talionis. Therefore, when the chorus pray that the "eye of the house", that is, Orestes, "not fall to utter [or "complete"] ruination" (934), they are, in effect, reminding the audience of the dangerous consequences, for Orestes, of acting as "the doer" of the deed of vengeance. The lesson of lex talionis that the doer must also suffer in turn is more damning for Orestes, whom the chorus describe as being "at the crest of much blood" (932). They are suggesting that matricide is, in their mind, the worst form of kin-killing, an act that will plunge him to ruin even as he is committing it. In this final section of Chapter Four, I examine how this double lesson of triumph and defeat is realized in the House of Pelops.

In strophe alpha (935-941), the chorus describe Δίκη as "heavily-just Recompense" (Ποινά) who has come to the family of Priam (935-936). If the women are [illegible], and, therefore, blood members of Priam's line, as some commentators believe, then their statement shows how easily and perversely Δίκη can be used as justification for murderous acts which led to the destruction of an entire family line. Because of Paris' violation of the law of hospitality, the whole line of Priam was "justly" destroyed by Agamemnon and his followers, a destruction which involved the enslavement of that line's female members, of whom the chorus form part. Implied in the chorus' statement on Δίκη, then, is the theme of the endless flow of blood.

Hence, when the women speak of the "twofold lion and twofold Ares that has come to Agamemnon's house, the implication is that, whoever these twin forces represent, they will suffer. The "twofold lion and twofold Ares" could as easily, in the song of the chorus, refer to Clytemnestra and Orestes, as they could to Orestes and Pylades. Pylades, unlike Clytemnestra, takes no physical part in the killing of any member of the House; his function in the scene leading up to Clytemnestra's death is simply to remind Orestes of "the oracles of Apollo and trustworthy oaths" (900-903). Insofar as Clytemnestra and Orestes belong to a house identified by its lion gates and governed by an Agamemnon who "lapped up his fill of princely blood like a ravenous lion" (Agamemnon, 825-827),[42] mother and son exhibit the Fury-like wrath of that lion who lapped up the blood of his enemies. Orestes, as "the exile who consults the Pythian god

urged by instructions from the gods" has "driven [or "spoken"] everything" [to the end of his course] (939-940).[43]

When the chorus in mesode alpha (942-945) urge themselves to "shout out a cry of triumph" (ἐπολολύξατ', 942) "for the escape of the house of masters from evils and from the wasting away of possessions by two polluters, grievous fortunes",[44] the women's words are ironic because the Justice that came to Agamemnon's house demands that evils continue until the pollutant Orestes suffers the same fate which he is exacting from his mother. The first level of reference contained in "two polluters" is to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, but the phrase also applies to Orestes and Clytemnestra, both of whom bring pollution upon the house by their murder of kin.

Antistrophe alpha (946-951) returns the audience to the figure of Justice described in strophe alpha. In the latter stanza, Δίκη was called "heavily-just Recompense"; now Δίκη is "deceitful-minded Recompense whose concern is stealthy battle" (946-947). At the very moment the chorus are describing Justice in this way, Orestes is acting on their behalf by killing his mother in fulfillment of the Justice demanded by the chorus. The male inside the house is subordinate to the females outside.

Moreover, the chorus go on to describe Δίκη as the daughter of Zeus and they play upon the similarity between Zeus and Δίκη in the alliterative phrase Διὸς κόρα, Δίκαν (949). Syntactically, the phrase makes Zeus subordinate to his daughter, Δίκη; she

appears, first, in the nominative case as κόρα (daughter) and, second, in the accusative case as Δίκαν, and the doubling of her presence diminishes the single appearance of Zeus' name in the genitive case.

In addition, there is irony in connecting Orestes' act of vengeance with Zeus, because it is Zeus' law of hospitality which Orestes has transgressed in order to exact Justice against his mother. The final description of Δίκη "breathing out destructive wrath" (951) reminds the audience of the wrath of the Furies, a point which I have discussed in Chapter Two.[45] Just as the chorus associated Μοῖραι and Δίκη with the code of the Ἐρινύες in lines 306-314, here in antistrophe alpha, the chorus refer to another deadly female triplet: Ποινά, Δίκη, and the Ἐρινύες. By associating Ποινά with Δίκη in both strophe and antistrophe alpha in different ways, the chorus unite three thematic elements of Choephori: the women celebrate a Justice which is deceitful, which bears the authority of Zeus through his daughter, and which breathes out the wrath of the Furies.

It is difficult to make sense of strophe beta (953-960), which has often been emended.[46] What is clear is that Apollo, the divine authority behind Orestes' plot of murder, is associated with a female divinity, probably Δίκη, because of the context. Whether or not one accepts Page's reading of lines 957-958, "the divine always prevails and this is why I do not serve evil [or "unfortunate people" or "things"] (κρατείτω δέ πως τὸ θεῖον, τὸ μή μ' ὑπουργεῖν

κακοῖς) or the general sense of M's reading (κρατεῖταί πως τὸ θεῖον παρὰ τὸ μὴ ὑπουργεῖν κακοῖς) to mean "the divine is somehow checked so that it does not furnish services to the wicked", the chorus' words are ironic. If Page is correct, the women are saying that they do not 'aid and abet' "evil" ("people" or "things"). Even if one acknowledges that Orestes was provoked into killing his mother because she killed his father, it would be impossible not to think of matricide as, at the very least, a "misfortune", if not an "evil". On the other hand, if M's reading is followed, then "the divine is somehow restrained from assisting evil" ("people" or "things"), in the women's view, because lex talionis dictates that the doer must suffer. This is why the chorus go on to say that "It is right and fitting to reverence the rule of heaven"; heaven dictates that the gods help only the good.

In mesode beta (961-964), the chorus say, using Verrall's translation, "It is possible to see the light" or "Light is present". "I am delivered from the great curb-chain of the house" (πάρα τὸ φῶς ἰδεῖν, μέγα τ' ἀφῃρέθη ψάλιον οἴκων, 961-962).[47] The chorus are describing their feeling of relief. The term ψάλιον suits slave women because it refers to the chain that curbs the jaw of a horse and, although it is not as restrictive as a bit, the curb is still a means of control. The death of Clytemnestra is made equivalent to the return of light and to the rising up of a house. On the surface then, the chorus praise Orestes for the murderous act he is committing. At a more subtle level, however, the women

celebrate the lifting of a great emotional burden from their minds and hearts. It is almost as though the vengeance brought upon Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and the consequences resulting to Orestes from those acts, are payment in kind for the destruction of the women's paternal homes and the murder of their own kinfolk. Although the women can never literally regain the security afforded by their own families and the walls of their paternal homes, walls "that have lain on the ground for too long" (963-964), their homes will live on in the persons of the women who are now freed of any curb-bit restraining them.

As Verrall notes, "the details" of the final stanza of the Third Stasimon, antistrophe beta (965-971) "are wholly uncertain". The general sense, he adds, is "..soon the house will be thoroughly purged".[48] Verrall is assuming, however, that the chorus truly support Orestes. If one retains M's reading of lines 967-968 (μύσος πᾶν ἐλάσει καθαρμοῖς ὅπαν ἐλατήριον, the chorus are saying "pollution drives away all purging through cleansing rites". One implication of this statement is that lex talionis is still operating, that is, that the pollution caused by acts of kin-killing make it impossible for the killer to be purged by cleansing rites. The final lines of this stanza (969-971) make no clear sense and scholars are divided on the meaning of these lines.[49] Whatever meaning is attributed to antistrophe beta, the general tone and context of the Third Stasimon imply that the chorus are singing a song of victory in a way that emphasizes the

lesson of Δίκη; this lesson demands that Orestes' song of victory turn into cries of defeat.

In the Exodos (972-1017), Orestes is revealed standing over two corpses. Like his mother, he displays the bodies of his victims while asserting the "Justice" of his acts. He points to the death robe in which Clytemnestra had wrapped Agamemnon. Unlike his mother, however, who boasted with delight as she looked at the bodies of her victims (Agamemnon, 1372 ff.), Orestes shows neither joy nor relief nor unquestioned confidence in the "Justice" of his act of matricide. Rather, he invokes Ἥλιος (the "Sun-god") to stand as witness both to his mother's "unholy deeds" and to the Justice of his act of matricide (985-989). His appeal suggests his anxiety at standing alone, without the presence of any divine source of support.

In the subsequent dialogue between Orestes and the chorus, the gloomy tone of the women's words results in repeated attempts by Orestes to justify his act of matricide. The chorus say: "Alas, alas, for vain deeds. You have been acted upon by a hateful death. Alas, alas, suffering also blossoms for the one who survives" (1007-1009). Orestes' suffering is coming into blossom (ἀνθεῖ, 1009) in the same way that the Aegean sea blossomed with the corpses of other Achaean youth who died on their return home from Troy in the fleets of Agamemnon and Menelaus (Agamemnon, 659-660). They women are asserting that death will also come to Orestes for his "vain acts" (μελέων ἔργων, 1006), just as similar acts brought death to Clytemnestra.

Orestes yields to the chorus' tone of foreboding by suddenly questioning the fact of Clytemnestra's guilt: "Did she do it or didn't she?" (1010). As in his earlier invocation to Hermes, Orestes goes so far as to refer to the death robe and Aegisthus' bloodstained sword as witnesses of the Justice of matricide (1014-1017). At a time when he should be celebrating victory over enemies, Orestes sings a song of lamentation, grieving for a victory that brings with it the inevitable consequence of pollution (1015).

The chorus respond by saying (1018-1020):[50]

οὔτις μερόπων ἀσινῆ βίοτον
διὰ παντ' ἂν ἄτιμος ἀμείψαι·
αἰαῖ αἰαῖ,
μόχθος δ' ὁ μὲν αὐτίχ', ὁ δ' ἤξει.

No unpunished mortal will go through an entire
lifetime unscathed.
Alas, alas, toil comes to one man straightaway,
to another it will come [later].

Rather than attempting to bolster Orestes' already waining confidence in the "Justice" of his act, the chorus further undercut it by speaking of the "toil" (μόχθος) which will befall him, as it does every man.

Orestes in lines 1021-1043 appears to understand the dire implications of the chorus' maxim as his confidence continues to fail. First, he questions the outcome of his previous acts; second, he says that his "wits that are hard to govern carry him him away as he is conquered" (νικώμενον, 1023-1024). His victory is quickly turning into defeat as he utters "Fear is ready to sing near my heart and to dance to wrath" (1024-1025). This is

reminiscent of the fear which the chorus described in the parodos as an "interpreter of dreams which fell heavily upon women's chambers" (33-37). Fear now falls upon Orestes who sings to its tune "I killed my mother not without Justice" (1027). The litotes underscores his sense of entrapment by a deed that brings him, thus far, no light and no rebuilt walls. Orestes does express, however, a need to flee to Apollo's shrine for expiation and protection (1035 ff.). This is no triumphal Orestes, but rather a man seeking to escape "this bloodletting of kin" (τόδ' αἷμα κοινόν, 1038).

When Orestes is at his lowest emotional and psychological ebb, the chorus revert to their role of counsellor and overt supporter. In lines 1044-1047, the women warn Orestes against "yoking [his] mouth to wicked speech". They go on to remind him of the way in which he "freed the whole city of Argives by cutting off the heads of two snakes" (1046-1047).[51] On the surface, the two snakes are Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but, within the context of Clytemnestra's dream of a murderous snake-son (523-550), Orestes cannot fail to interpret the chorus' words as a reference to the cutting off of his own snake-head.[52]

Orestes suddenly realizes the truth and cries out in horror. Hence, when he looks at the chorus, he 'sees', at the same moment, the Ἐρινύες.[53] These "gorgon-like females" wear black robes and have many snakes twining in their heads (1048-1050). The chorus respond by voicing disbelief in Orestes' imaginings: "Hold on,

don't be afraid, act as a victor" (1051-1052). At the very moment Orestes cries out in defeat, the chorus tell him to act as a victor, but this does not encourage him. The terrible clarity of Orestes' visions leaves him unable to conquer his wits. He perceives the Ἐρινύες to be the "wrathful gods of [his] mother" (1054). The chorus then mock Orestes, blaming his chaotic emotions and terrifying visions on the presence of fresh blood on his hands (1055). Whether or not there was a separate band of females dressed as the Furies, it is clear from Orestes' description that he perceives a similarity between the chorus and the Furies both in dress and function. As Sider notes:[54]

> Given Aeschylus' reputation and the emphasis on blood in the Oresteia, we should allow that the chorus did indeed appear wearing masks designed with bloody cheeks, and with ragged clothes..their dress suits the role they play in the first half of the play: agents of the Furies.

When the chorus tell Orestes that his "one cleansing" comes from Loxias who "will make [him] free of these woes" (1059-1060), the audience must wonder how this statement can be true. The chorus have not only encouraged Orestes to kill kin, but they are also the same women who have, ironically, described such murderous acts in terms of seeing the "light of freedom" (809). In fact this description is not unequivocably borne out by the drama of the law-court scene in the third play: Orestes obtains his freedom, not through any purging rituals at Apollo's shrine in Delphi. He becomes the object of an ironic argument about the nature of kin or blood relationship between wife, husband, and son.

Orestes' acquittal, his ability to see the "light of freedom", comes to pass because Athena, who always supports the male, casts the deciding vote (Eumenides, 735-741).

The last words Orestes utters in this play are an assertion that the chorus do not see the females he sees; he is driven off stage, unable to remain (1061-1062). Only for a brief moment did Orestes behold the women as Furies. As Orestes leaves the stage, the women wish him "prosperity" (εὐτυχοίης, 1063), a term which they had used in the parodos to describe one of the causes of man's downfall (59-60). Moreover, when they pray "May a well-disposed god oversee and guard you with timely [and "deadly"] fortunes" (καιρίοισι συμφοραῖς, 1063-1064), they remind the audience of the ill fortunes of Agamemnon and Cassandra, both striken by "timely" and "deadly" death blows. These acts of vengeance are, in turn, followed by other "timely" and "deadly fortunes".

In the epilogue to Choephori (1065-1071), the chorus turn once again to us, their audience, summarizing the "three wintry and violent storms that have breathed and run their course on the royal palaces" of the House of Pelops (1065-1068). The three storms, according to the chorus, have resulted in the doom of males. The first is the killing of the sons of Thyestes, who were slain by his brother, Atreus, and feasted upon by their father (1068-1069); the second is the royal suffering of a man (husband?), a warrior-leader of the Achaeans who perished slain in the bath, i.e.

Agamemnon (1070-1071); the third is the arrival of Orestes whom the women describe in such terms as "but now, in turn, a third has come from somewhere, a saviour or should I say doom?" (νῦν δ' αὖ τρίτος ἦλθέ ποθεν σωτήρ, ἢ μόρον εἴπω;, 1073-1074). In separating the adjective τρίτος ("third") from the nouns σωτήρ and μόρον, the chorus allow the audience to think, for a brief moment, that the women are going to speak of the third "storm", thereby stressing the irony of their description of Orestes as "saviour" or "doom". In addition, the male child whom the chorus described in line 264 together with his sister as "saviours of [your] father's hearth" is now equated with "doom".

Moreover, by using masculine terms to describe the Ἄτη that has struck the House, the chorus concentrate on the male members of Pelops' line. In this final ode, the chorus exclude any reference to females, whether victims or killers: Iphigenia, Clytemnestra, and the "female" Aegisthus are not mentioned.[55] By describing male victims in terms of violent storms, the chorus imply that all the storms of destructive wrath in the House originate from men and must, therefore, be paid for by men.

The chorus then conclude the play with the question: "Where then will it come to pass, where will the strength of Ἄτη be lulled to sleep and [thus] cease?" (1075-1076). Given the women's repeated lesson of lex talionis, and their emphasis upon avenging triplets, and now triple storms, the audience must wonder whether the trilogy will end with Orestes' utter "doom". The power of the

chorus of foreign serving women has been so effective that, although forced to speak from behind veils and through ambiguous language, they have succeeded in acting as agents of Δίκη, Ἄτη, and the Ἐρινύες.

Footnotes

1. Lebeck, "The First Stasimon of Aeschylus' Choephori: Myth and Mirror Image" CP 62 (1967), p. 182.

2. Many commentators think that the First Stasimon is primarily a condemnation of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Verrall, for example, pp. 86 and 88, says:

> The ode itself is carefully adapted to its function as a mere symbolic interlude being in theme and treatment wholly non-dramatic...The previous discourse on the monstrous effects of passion, and of female passion in particular, is pointed of course at Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus.

And Tucker, p. 134:

> The chorus occupies the interval with apt reflections, emphasizing once more the enormity of Clytaemnestra's crime and the justice of her inevitable punishment.

And Rose, p. 178:

> If all his [Aeschylus'] mythological examples are of women who did ill, that is because the Chorus have a woman in mind, Klytaimestra, who they recognise is the prime mover in the whole affair.

Garvie, p. 203, however, asserts:

> Lebeck (though some of her 'mirror-images' are somewhat over-subtle) has shown that one must look for a wider relevance, and that, although the emphasis is on crimes committed by women against male relations, Aeschylus is thinking also of the broader context of crimes in the house of Atreus.

3. Gods and Heroes of the Greeks: The Library of Apollodorus, trans. Michael Simpson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), 1.7.1. ff.

4. Lebeck, "First Stasimon", p. 182.

5. If there are any resemblances between Althaea and Clytemnestra, they must surely derive from the way masculine acts have aroused the women's anger; Clytemnestra is harmed by two men, a husband who sacrificed his daughter, and a son who fails to remember, or to take into account, at the moment of killing his mother, the father who killed his sister.

6. Lebeck, "First Stasimon", n. 5, points out "in the more common version of Scylla's story, passion is her motive. See Paus. 1. 19. 4; Apollod. 2. 15. 8; Nonn. Dion. 25. 161 ff., Prop. 4. 19. 21; Ov. Met. 8. 90 ff., Ciris 130".

7. Clytemnestra has the tongue of a hateful bitch (Ag. 1228); she is the "good" or "noble watch-dog of the house" (Ag. 602); cf. also Il. 6.344, 356, where Helen, her sister, speaks of herself as a "chilling evil-minded bitch" and a "bitch".

8. Lebeck, "First Stasimon", p. 183, argues that the mythological stories "are intended as condemnation of Clytemnestra" even though they are "inappropriately" (ἀναίρως δέ) told by the chorus. Her argument is difficult, however, if one accepts her assertion that the mythological stories are reflections of the crimes committed by men in the House.

9. The stories are also inappropriately told because the chorus seem to be referring to Clytemnestra when they speak of "all-daring passion" (597), but it is obvious from the women's versions of the mythological stories that Althaea's and Scylla's motives do not include that of sexual passion, as Clytemnestra's did.

10. I am comparing the power of the women to harm or to destroy the image of man to the way Clytemnestra, as I have shown in Chapters Two and Three, kills Agamemnon a second and third time by speaking in the historic present tense, of the death blows she strikes at him. The power of the chorus reside in their words, not in their physical actions. In strophe gamma, line 628 is corrupt. Some commentators have replaced σέβας with ἔβας, thereby supplying what appears to be a missing verb in the sentence. Nevertheless, the meaning and text is in doubt. Stanley has emended M's τίων in line 629 to read τίω making the chorus the subject of the sentence. If one retains τίων, the subject of the participle could be the warrior-man, a description which would fit the characterization of Agamemnon who would "honour the unheated hearth of [his] house and [his wife's] female undaring spirit". The word τίων also has ominous connotations. See n. 54 in Chapter Two.

11. See Apollonius Rhodius, 1.609 ff. for a fuller account of the myth regarding the Lemnian women. Cf. Pindar's Pythian IV, 252.

12. Herodotus, 6.138-139.

13. Rose, p. 181, argues that ἀτιμωθέν has political and, hence, male connotations. "The word means 'disfranchised', i.e. men who are made ἄτιμοι in the citizenship of humanity". This strengthens Lebeck's view that the chorus' version of the story has male overtones.

14. The chorus, at the beginning of the kommos (306 ff.), associated Μοῖραι with Δίκη as agents of the Ἐρινύες. In the First Stasimon, the women refer to a very similar female triplet: Δίκη, Ἐρινύες, and Αἶσα has replaced Μοῖραι, but the meaning of the two words are similar, "Fate" or "Destiny".

15. Kaimio, p. 92.

16. O. Taplin, The Stagecraft of Aeschylus (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 338, notes "585 exeunt Orestes, Pylades, and Electra".

17. Plato, in Laws 872d-873a, states: 'the son who kills his mother must inherit her female nature'.

18. Πειθώ, a female noun, is an abstraction connected with disaster and death in the trilogy. In Ag. 385-386, the chorus of Argive elders say "relentless Persuasion, insufferable child of Ἄτη, compels him [Paris], and every remedy is useless". Although Clytemnestra does not use the term "Persuasion" in any form to describe her own deceit of Agamemnon, res ipsa locuta; she persuaded Agamemnon to walk on oriental tapestries (922 ff.).

19. Taplin, p. 339, notes that the chorus of Choephori never leave the orchestra.

20. Alexiou, p. 10.

21. Some commentators doubt the accuracy of Cilissa's view of Clytemnestra's grief over the news of her son's death. See, for example, J. Margon, "The Nurse's View of Clytemnestra's Grief for Orestes in Choephori, 733-740, U. of Calif. at Santa Barbara, CW 76.5 (1983), argues that Cilissa misinterpreted Clytemnestra's expression of grief over the news of her son's death.

22. Lattimore translates lines 773-777 as follows:

> Ch. It is the messenger who makes the bent word straight.
> Ci. But are you happy over what I have told you?
> Ch. Perhaps: if Zeus might turn our evil wind to good.
> Ci. How so? Orestes, once hope of the house, is gone.
> Ch. Not yet. It would be a poor seer who saw it thus.

Lattimore's translation does not indicate the ominous connotations in the Greek text. I have, therefore, translated these lines as literally as possible, while attempting to show the negative nuances in the passage.

Ch. For a hidden word is set straight in a messenger.
Ci. But are you thinking well with these things now announced?
Ch. Yes, if Zeus will place a trophy of evils.
Ci. And how? Of Orestes, hope has departed, of the house.
Ch. Not yet. An evil prophet would know these things.

23. Garvie, p. 256, rejects M's reading of τύχας τυχεῖν because he considers it "too neutral" a phrase for the chorus to be using when describing the good fortunes of the House.

24. J. Gould, "Law, Custom and Myth: Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens" JHS Vol. 100 (1980), p. 53.

25. Ibid.

26. This is why Garvie, p. 259, rejects the meaning of μέτρον as "moderation".

27. Winnington-Ingram, p. 222.

28. Tucker, pp. 180-181; Sidgwick, p. 61; Rose, p. 199, all agree that the chorus are referring to Delphic Apollo.

29. Verrall, pp. 115-116, asserts that the women are asking the god who controls the passageway between the living and the dead to permit Orestes' warrior ancestors to support him. This is ironic in itself, for Orestes' ancestors would include Thyestes, Atreus, Pelops, and Tantalus.

30. Garvie, p. 265.

31. Sidgwick, p. 61, follows Heimsoeth and Wecklein in rejecting line 815 for reasons of metre and sense; he emends M's λέγων to λέγω in line 816 making the chorus the speak of the "obscure word". This meaning fits a chorus of slave women whose words are often ambiguous.

32. In line 476, the chorus invoke the "blessed chthonic gods", a reference which probably includes Hermes to whom they appeal as "chthonic" in line 727.

33. Wind imagery is often associated with death, violence, and anger, particularly of females, in this trilogy.
See Ag. 193-204, Artemis, in anger at the Atreidae, caused storm winds to blow at Aulis, thereby preventing them from sailing to Troy.
In Cho. 390-392, the chorus speak of their own hateful anger which blows like winds.
And, again, in Cho. 591-592, the chorus describe "winged creatures and creatures who walk on the ground speak of the windy wrath of hurricanes".

34. Taplin, p. 343, notes "718 exeunt Orestes and Pylades, exit Clytemnestra.
Τέκνον, literally, "the thing born" is the chorus' term for addressing Orestes (324, 523). The only time they use a different form of address is when they speak to him and Electra collectively, calling them both "children" (παῖδες, 265).

35. Schultz emended M's reading of περαίνων ἐπίμομφαν ἅταν to πέραιν' ἀνεπίμομφον ἅταν. When the last syllable of περαίνων should be emended to ον instead of ων for metrical reasons, no other changes are necessary. Garvie, p. 270, accepts Schultz' emendation because "the Chorus is unlikely to describe the vengeance as ἐπίμομφος, 'blameable'".

36. Michael Grant, Myths of the Greeks and Romans (New York: New American Library, 1962, p. 349, quotes Freud's interpretation of the cutting off of the gorgon's head as the means by which Perseus and Orestes can regain power. The desire for power and property is part of what in Oresteia drives Orestes' back to Argos (Cho. 252 ff.). Clytemnestra mutilated her husband's corpse for a similar reason, namely, in order to render him powerless. There are also obvious similarities between the gorgons and the Ἐρινύες; both groups of females have snakes instead of hair and both pursue a male for his killing of a female 'gorgon' (Cho. 1058 and Apollodorus, 2.4.2).
Although for the ancient Greeks snakes were a symbol of immortality and fertility and were sacred to such personages as Zeus Μειλίχιος (Zeus, A study in Ancient Religion by A.B. Cook, Vol. II (Cambridge: University Press, 1925), pp. 1091-1160), Athena (See Sider, no. 39), and Asclepius (Apol. 3.10.3) et al., it is important to note that in Aeschylus' Sup. 262 ff., Pelasgus, king of Argos, connects snakes to an image of "man-destroying" serpents which had to be cleansed and driven from the land because of the pollution they caused.

37. Bloomfield's emendation of M's λυπρᾶς to λυγρᾶς is unnecessary, both for metre and meaning. The first syllable in λυπρᾶς can be long or short, according to the rule of plosion (M.L. West, pp. 16-17).

38. Winnington-Ingram, n. 5, p. 134.
If Orestes had been found guilty, Plato's description of lex talionis states that he would be killed by the judges and magistrates as atonement for the bloody pollution (μιανθέντος αἵματος, 872) he caused.

39. Ag. 281 ff., where Clytemnestra describes the relay of beacons which signalled to her the defeat of Troy and Agamenon's imminent death at her hands.
At 596-597, Clytemnestra describes the burning sacrifices women in the city of Argos performed on her behalf in celebration of the defeat of Troy and Agamemnon's return to Argos.
At 1435-1436, Clytemnestra describes the fire of her hearth which Aegisthus, her lover, kindled.
And in Eum. 1021 ff., Athena describes the torchlight processions that are to take place at the end of the trilogy.

40. Taplin, p. 356, notes "930 exeunt Clytemnestra, Orestes (and Pylades)". So the chorus are uttering lines 930-934 while Orestes and Pylades are leading Clytemnestra to her death. The women are singing their song of victory, the Third Stasimon, while Clytemnestra is being killed.

41. Rose, p. 210.

42. Cf. Eum. 183, Apollo describes the Furies as creatures who dwell in the cave of a blood-lapping lion. Other references to lions include: Ag. 1223-1224, where Cassandra describes Aegisthus as a cowardly lion wallowing in his bed; at 717, Helen is the lion cub which grew up and destroyed the very people who nourished it.
See Cho. 461 for another association between Δίκη and Ἄρης.

43. Pauw emended M's reading of ἔλασε in line 939 to ἔλασσε; if the scholiast is right in stating that Aeschylus is continuing the metaphor of a chariot race from lines 794 ff., then ἔλασε would make little sense whreas ἔλασσε would provide the suitable meaning.

44. The verb ὀλολύζω usually refers to cries of women (Liddell-Scott, s.v.). Aeschylus uses the word to refer primarily to cries of triumph, but, in the context of Oresteia, these triumphal cries usually signal imminent death. See, for

example, Ag. 28, where the guard tells Clytemnestra to raise an ὀλολυγμόν as he sees the beacon light which signals the defeat of Troy.
At 587, Clytemnestra tells the chorus she cried in triumph (ἀνωλόλυξα) when she saw the beacon light which signalled the defeat of Troy.
At 594-597, Clytemnestra describes women throughout the city crying ὀλολυγμόν while performing sacrifices in celebration of the destruction of Troy.
At 1236-1237, Cassandra reveals the ominous connotations of these female cries of triumph. She say: "And how she [Clytemnestra], the all-daring one, cried out in triumph [ἐπωλολύξατο], as if at the turning point of a battle. She appears to rejoice in his safe return-home".
And in Cho. 585, the chorus express a wish to shout ὀλολυγμόν "over a man smitten and a woman dead". The only exception in the trilogy seems to be in Eum. 1043 and 1047, where either the chorus or a group of professional escorts shout ὀλολύξατε.
Also, in Od. 3.450, Homer describes the sacrifice of a heifer during which the women shouted ὀλολύξαν.

45. This anticipates the wrathful dogs of a mother, beasts who, as avenging Furies, hunt Orestes down.
Winds of wrath form a common metaphor in the trilogy (See above, n. 34).

46. See Garvie, pp. 310-311, for a more detailed discussion of proposed emendations to lines 953-960.

47. Verrall, pp. 137-138.
Sidgwick, p. 71, proposes οἰκέων for MSS.' οἴκων, a word which emphasizes a relationship to, or ownership by, the house. Οἰκέων would, therefore, suit my interpretation of these lines since it is also a word that is used to describe the menial or servile status of servants (Liddell-Scott, s.v.).

48. Verrall, p. 138.

49. See Garvie, pp. 14-15, for a fuller discussion of possible emendations to lines 969-971.

50. M's reading of line 1018 has ἄτιμος, which Page accepts. This word, however, rarely denotes the idea "unpunished", which is the meaning desired here. Garvie, p. 335, emends the word to ἀτίτης. Ἄτιμος is in keeping with the ambiguous language of the chorus; it is a word which has ominous connotations of vengeance, as well as of dishonour.

51. The chorus establish a political level to Orestes' act of matricide; it is not the house he is saving, but the city (πόλις). It is fitting that an act which will result in the overturning of old and unwritten laws in Eum. is described, after the act has been done, in terms of its political consequences.

52. It is important to remember that, while both Orestes and Clytemnestra have been referred to as snakes, Aegisthus is never referred to as a snake, not even obliquely.

53. Verrall, p. 151, discusses the possibility posed by Hermann, Burges (and Wecklein) that Orestes is not only seeing the Furies when he looks at the chorus, but he is also addressing the women as such. These scholars read ποῖαι γυναῖκες αἵδε and δειναὶ γυναῖκες αἵδε respectively as vocatives. Verrall rejects this and argues that the Furies whom Orestes sees are figments of his imagination. Whether or not one accepts Verrall's view or that of Hermann et al., it is clear that Orestes is looking at the slave women when he speaks of seeing the Furies.

54. Sider, p. 19.

55. Although, as noted earlier, Orestes does employ "female" deceit in his murder-plot, his "femaleness" is not of primary importance in the trilogy, nor is it his main characteristic or fault, as is the case with Aegisthus. It is Aegisthus' female qualities which the chorus of Argive elders condemn most in the first play; femininity is his primary flaw. In Orestes' case, however, it is his masculinity which the chorus of Choephori attack. As the male offspring of Agamemnon, he must be destroyed in order to ensure the total destruction of the House the continuation of which is determined by patrilineal descent.

CHAPTER FIVE

A FEMALE SONG

Froma Zeitlin, a modern feminist writer, in an article entitled "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the Oresteia" examines the trilogy in terms of what she calls male/female oppositions:[1]

> The polarizing imagination of Greek mythic thought not only establishes a strong dichotomy between male and female, it also posits predictable behavioral responses at either end of the spectrum where female self-assertion on her own behalf is expressed only at the cost of annihilating the Other.

Although Zeitlin is speaking specifically of Clytemnestra, her comments may also be applied to the chorus of Choephori. The chorus are the first major group of females to appear in the trilogy, and it is surprising that Zeitlin does not apply her theories about Aeschylus' hatred of women to this chorus, nor to Electra, nor to Cassandra. All of these women are missing from her account of the Other in the trilogy. Instead, Zeitlin examines oppositions between Clytemnestra and her husband; Clytemnestra and her son and, finally, between Apollo, Athena and the Furies. As a central line in her argument, she lists a series of antitheses that "form the polarization of male and female roles in the trilogy". Some of these dichotomies include: male/female; law/ritual; future (young)/old; order/chaos; active/passive; reason/unreason (sexuality; passion); light/dark; clarity (plain speaking)/obscurity (riddle); and, finally, positive/negative.[2] Zeitlin does not explore in any

detail the rhetoric, the tone, or the images contained in the trilogy, factors which inevitably affect the accuracy and fairness of any judgement about the playwright's treatment of the female. By studying only the general themes and details of plot, Zeitlin concludes that Aeschylus is misogynistic. If one applies her method of approach to the chorus of Choephori it is clear that, on the surface, the women appear hateful, "dark", "obscure" -- the Other. My study of the language and images depicting this chorus indicates, however, that the ambiguous appearance of the women is itself deceiving: as the guard of Agamemnon says, the women "speak to those who understand, and to those who do not, [they, like the guard] forget [everything]" (Agamemnon, 38). Ambiguity, or the use of opposing stories, is a positive thing; it works on the side of the female.

When the women first begin to speak in the parodos, they describe themselves as "slaves who have been taken from their paternal homes" at some unspecified time by Agamemnon or other male members of his line (75 ff.). As I have noted in Chapter Two, they are women who have been deprived of their original homes and families. These families have been killed, if not by the women's enslavers themselves, then by other men whom those enslavers represent.

In the same ode, the women take up the song of the Furies, linking the violation of 'virgins' to the 'disease' of kin-killing in the House, and then place both crimes under the aegis of lex talionis. The blood that flows endlessly in Choephori is a liquid

that blends together blood from the women's cheeks, 'blood' flowing from their violated beds, and blood spilled by the Pelopidae. Thus, the image of blood in Choephori implies primarily violent, physical crimes committed by males against females.

According to Zeitlin, one must forget who began and, for the most part, continued the chain of bloodletting in the House, and she considers bloodletting only in terms of equitablity:[3]

> In the Aeschylean version of the myth, the woman does not initiate the hostilities. She is spurred to retaliation by a prior outrage inflicted upon her by a male. Clytemnestra, enraged by the treatment of her daughter as a sacrificial animal, plots revenge, and is reinforced in her resolve to kill her husband by Agamemnon's intention to introduce his concubine into the domestic space of the legitimate wife..But the female response invariably exceeds the provocation offered by the male and creates a still more violent disequilibrium that brings society to a standstill.

The social disorder that has brought Agamemnon's household to a familial, religious, and political impasse arises not from Clytemnestra, as Zeitlin argues, but from Agamemnon, and earlier male progenitors (like Tantalus). Within the religious laws that operate until the Furies are overturned, the only recourse a female has is either to accept the violation of what she holds dear, or to retaliate openly like Clytemnestra, or covertly, like the chorus. In any case, the "havoc caused by the female" is inextricably linked to the prior evil action of the male.[4]

The need to hide their true feelings, that is, to "weep under veils" is a key to understanding and appreciating Aeschylus' sensitivity in his realistic portrayal of slave women whose "life

[is] fed with griefs" (81 and 27). In the women's experience, hate has necessarily replaced their ability to love and their physical links to beloved relatives. But that hate cannot be voiced openly; in order to express it, the women must either "speak an obscure word" (816) or incite others who hate to act for them. There is a marked similarity between these women and the guard in the first play; like the women, he grieves over the burdensome life he leads; also like them, he cannot utter his true feelings except through ambiguous language, words that, in fact, are uttered when no one is present to hear them. Men and women suffer alike in a house where kin-killing, the feasting on babies' flesh, and the cutting of a daughter's throat in sacrificial offering dominate.

If Aeschylus' depiction of these women is realistic, it would be logical for them to hate not only Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, who are now the masters of Agamemnon's household, but also the dead Agamemnon and his children, particularly his son, Orestes, who, if he regains control and continues the patriachal rule in the House, will become the same kind of master over these women that his father was.[5]

The women recognize, hoever, that in this patriachal society, the only way to destroy members of a House which is responsible for their enslavement and the death of their families is by pretending to be the docile slaves Argive society expects them to be. The chorus appear sympathetic to the House in order to use Orestes' and Electra's desire for support and counsel to teach the children

how to put their hatred for Clytemnestra into action. In this way, the women influence and control others who act for them. They focus primarily on Orestes, because he represents, as Agamemnon's only son, the sole hope of the continuation of the male line of Atreus. It is Orestes, therefore, and not Electra, whom the chorus encourage to carry out the act of matricide. The women know very well that such an act will place Orestes' life in jeopardy, since it is an act of lex talionis that, in turn, dictates that Orestes must die for killing his mother. In a sense, then, the women are simply upholding one of the ancient laws that have always governed the House.

As reflections of the "godless woman" Clytemnestra, the chorus are women who have been turned into loveless singers of the song of the Furies. Wrath and grief are all that remain, and they are feelings which the women can express only through the singing of riddling songs. As slaves, language is the only means of attack they possess and, hence, their weapon is the female "Deceitful Persuasion".

When they play the role of storytellers in the First Stasimon, the women's version of myths about hateful women are not aimed at condemning aspects of Clytemnestra, as Zeitlin believes, but rather at obliquely condemning males in the House. As noted in Chapter Four, the myth of Althaea reflects the story of Orestes' premeditated murder of his mother; the story of Scylla reflects its mirror image, Agamemnon's slaughter of his daughter; and the Lemnian affair depits a house where murder of kin results

in the eradication of an entire male line. In addition, the chorus, by emphasizing that the line that has departed is "disfranchised", hint of the total destruction of the male line of Pelops. Zeitlin, however, argues:[6]

> The Lemnian allusion completes the misogynistic progression by moving from one to all, from individual transgression to a collective menace that wipes out an entire race.

Zeitlin further suggests that the mythological stories intensify an image of Clytemnestra as an archetypal female attempting to rule over and, therefore, to annihilate the male. This is her idea of what makes Aeschylus' woman the Other, a negative exemplum of the female. Zeitlin ignores the different emphases the chorus give to each of the stories; the changes are subtle, the language often ambiguous, but, reading the stanzas the way Lebeck does, leads the audience from the female mythical character to the male behind the story. If "moving from one to all" condemns woman, it is an even greater condemnation of all the males whose actions inspire the chorus' stories.

Several times in Choephori the chorus speak of female triplets, just as they tell three stories in the First Stasimon, in order to justify their revenge on the evil House. The significance of these various combinations of Ἄτη (Αἶσα or Μοῖρα), Δίκη, and Ἐρινύες has been fully discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis. It is important to remember, however, that the chorus conclude the play with an even more powerful triple image, and that this image is masculine and destructive.

If, therefore, the movement from one to all creates, as Zeitlin argues, a "paradigm",[7] then the paradigm of Choephori is contained in the final male triple storm. The three storms consist of Atreus' offering to a brother of children's flesh as food, Agamemnon's slaughter of his daughter as sacrifice which led to his own death, and, finally, Orestes' act of matricide as a "saving-doom".

Choephori thus moves from female to male, and largely through the influence of the chorus, reveals how females are displaced by males at every level of significance in the trilogy. Whether as victim, like Cassandra, Iphigenia, and the chorus, or as killer, like Clytemnestra, the female has no spokesman in the trilogy apart from Aeschylus. It is his vision of how woman suffers under patriachy that informs every female character or set of characters in the trilogy. This is a point which Podlecki notes:[8]

> A survey of Aeschylus' female characters thus seems to refute any charge of male chauvinism against the dramatist.. His female characters are handled in a life-like and convincing way, with sensitivity and understanding. Aeschylus' women make, if anything, a greater claim on our sympathies than his men. They are in most cases - and I am thinking primarily of Clytemnestra - far more convincing.

If, therefore, the female appears hateful and dark, she must be so in order for Aeschylus to portray the burdens laid upon her by arbitrary and repressive male values and decisions. This darkness or spitefulness is not a sign of his misogynistic intention in portraying the female, but rather an indication of

a "truth" that must be told in order to encourage an audience to evaluate and understand the reasons for that "truth". The "truth" about the chorus of Choephori resounds in every part of their songs. They are slaves, their words count for nothing; they are women, they cannot act on their own. They were wives, mothers, sisters, daughters; their families have been destroyed by men's battles. They are mourners of the House, they cannot even weep for their own lost dead. Aeschylus makes one lesson about women clear to his audience: the female has no substance under the rule of the male House of Pelops.

Footnotes

1. Froma Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the Oresteia", Arethusa 11 (1978), p. 153.

2. Ibid, pp. 171-172. In this list of antitheses, Zeitlin includes male "intention" as opposed to female "act". The latter description, however, can only be applied to Clytemnestra, who is the only female in the trilogy who commits an act of murder. Elsewhere in Oresteia, females are depicted as passive victims who are unable to "act" for themselves, e.g. Electra, Cassandra, and the chorus of Choephori. The emphasis in Cho., as I have argued, is on the active male Orestes.
There is a similar difficulty with the polarity Zeitlin poses between male "odd" and female "even". The predominant triplets in Cho. are, as I have shown, female, although there is a male triplet mentioned at the end of the play.
In either case, the polar opposites are incorrect because Aeschylus depicts both male and female in the terms Zeitlin describes.
See also Page duBois, Centaurs & Amazons (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1982), particularly pp. 1-5, where she discusses polar oppositions between males and females in ancient Greece.

3. Zeitlin, p. 156. It is, after all, Agamemnon who sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia, an act which provoked his wife into killing him. It is, therefore, Agamemnon (if one is speaking specifically of his house as opposed to the more general House of Pelops) who started the chain of events that led to the social dysfunction in the house. Clytemnestra's retaliation, although criminal, is understandable and can hardly be viewed as more provocative, from a feminist perspective, than the sacrifice of a daughter.

4. Ibid.

5. What Zeitlin denies, then, is that Aeschylus' portrayal of women is realistic. Virginia Woolf, however, who is regarded by many modern feminists as the 'mother' of feminist writing, in "On Not Knowing Greek", an article included in the book entitled The Common Reader.I (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 27, describes Sophocles' depiction of Clytemnestra and female characters in general as:

> It is no murderess, violent and unredeemed, whom Orestes kills within the house, and Electra bids him utterly destroy..No; the men and women standing outside in the sunlight before the audience on the hill-side were alive enough, subtle enough, not mere figures, or plaster casts of human beings.

Although Woolf is speaking specifically of Sophocles' Electra and Antigone, his portrayal of Clytemnestra, for example, is not unlike that of Aeschylus in Oresteia. In both characterizations Clytemnestra is provoked into killing her husband because of his slaughter of their daughter; and both Clytemnestra characters are hated by a second daughter who encourages her brother to kill his mother. While there are, of course, subtle and distinct differences in the two playwrights' characterizations, Aeschylus' portrayal of women such as Clytemnestra in the trilogy and the chorus of Choephori is not that of mere "plaster casts of human beings". Rather, as Woolf notes:

> By the..use of metaphor he [Aeschylus] will amplify and give us, not the thing itself, but the reverberations and reflection which, taken into his mind, the thing has made; close enough to the original to illustrate it, remote enough to heighten, enlarge, and make splendid.

6. Zeitlin, p. 156.

7. Ibid.

8. Anthony J. Podlecki, "Aeschylus' Women", Helios 10.1 (1983), p. 43. In this study of Aeschylus' characterization of females, Podlecki discusses the pitiable and touching portrayal of Iphigenia who is slaughtered by her own father (p. 36). Moreover, he shows how, through the "confusion in the sexual roles of the major characters", Aeschylus does not depict females in a misogynistic way (p. 32). Instead, he shows that both male and female have negative and positive traits.
Contra, duBois, p. 91:

> In this magnificent drama [the Oresteia], Aeschylus works with the polarities between Greek and barbarian, male and female, human and divine, to build an over-arching structure of progress, from the archaic, monarchical past, a world dominated by revenge and the "phallic" Clytemnestra, to a community of equals, where

the vengeful, monstrous Furies are set underground, banished by the votes of the Athenians and the goddess Athena. Froma Zeitlin has shown how the richness of Aeschylus' polarizing and hierachizing imagery creates a new misogynistic myth, in this "gynecocentric document."

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